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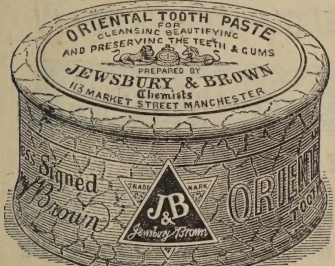

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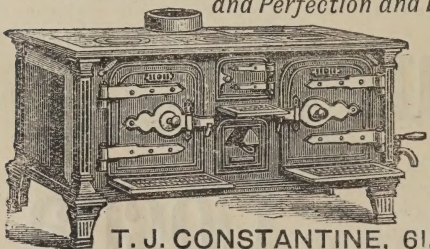

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CHAPTER I.

HELEN LINGARD.

A SWIFT gray November wind had taken every chimney of the house for an organ-pipe, and was roaring in them all at once, quelling the more distant and varied noises of the woods, which moaned and surged like a sea. Helen Lingard had not been out all day. The morning, indeed, had been fine, but she had been writing a long letter to her brother Leopold at Cambridge, and had put off her walk in the neighbouring park till after luncheon, and in the meantime the wind had risen, and brought with it a haze that threatened rain. She was in admirable health, had never had a day's illness in her life, was hardly more afraid of getting wet than a young farmer, and enjoyed wind, especially when she was on horseback. Yet as she stood looking from her window, across a balcony where shivered more than one autumnal plant that ought to have been removed a week ago, out upon the old-fashioned garden and meadows beyond, where each lonely tree bowed with drifting garments —I was going to say like a suppliant, but it was *away* from its storming enemy—she did not feel inclined to go out. That she was healthy was no reason why she should be unimpressible, any more than that good temper should be a reason for indifference to the behaviour of one's friend. She always felt happier in a new dress, when it was made to her

mind and fitted her body ; and when the sun shone she was lighter-hearted than when it rained : I had written *merrier*, but Helen was seldom merry, and had she been made aware of the fact and questioned why, would have answered—Because she so seldom saw reason. She was what all her friends called a sensible girl ; but, as I say, that was no reason why she should be an insensible girl as well, and be subject to none of the influences of the weather. She did feel those influences, and therefore it was that she turned away from the window with the sense, rather than the conviction, that the fireside in her own room was rendered even more attractive by the unfriendly aspect of things outside and the roar in the chimney, which happily was not accompanied by a change in the current of the smoke.

The hours between luncheon and tea are confessedly dull, but dulness is not inimical to a certain kind of comfort, and Helen liked to be that way comfortable. Nor had she ever yet been aware of self-rebuke because of the liking. Let us see what kind and degree of comfort she had in the course of an hour and a half attained. And in discovering this, I shall be able to present her to my reader with a little more circumstance.

She sat before the fire in a rather masculine posture. I would not willingly be rude, but the fact remains—a posture in which she would not, I think, have sat for her photograph—leaning back in a chintz-covered easy-chair, all the lines of direction about her parallel with the lines of the chair, her arms lying on its arms, and the fingers of each hand folded down over the end of each arm—square, straight, right-angled—gazing into the fire, with something of the look of a sage, but one who has made no discovery.

She had just finished the novel of the day, and was suffering a mild reaction—the milder, perhaps, that she was not altogether satisfied with the consummation. For the heroine had, after much sorrow and patient endurance, at length married a man whom she could not help knowing to be not worth having. For the author even knew it, only such was his reading of life, and such his theory of artistic

duty, that what it was a disappointment to Helen to peruse, it seemed to have been a comfort to him to write. Indeed her dissatisfaction went so far, that, although the fire kept burning away in perfect content before her, enhanced by the bellowing complaint of the wind in the chimney, she yet came nearer thinking than she had ever been in her life. Now thinking, especially to one who tries it for the first time, is seldom or never a quite comfortable operation, and hence Helen was very near becoming actually uncomfortable. She was even on the borders of making the unpleasant discovery that the business of life—and that not only for north-pole expeditions, African explorers, pyramid-inspectors, and such like, but for every man and woman born into the blindness of the planet, is to discover—after which discovery there is little more comfort to be had of the sort with which Helen was chiefly conversant. But she escaped for the time after a very simple and primitive fashion, although it was indeed a narrow escape.

Let me not be misunderstood, however, and supposed to imply that Helen was dull in faculty, or that she contributed nothing to the bubbling of the intellectual pool in the social gatherings at Glaston. Far from it. When I say that she came near thinking, I say more for her than any but the few who know what thinking is will understand, for that which chiefly distinguishes man from those he calls the lower animals is the faculty he most rarely exercises. True, Helen supposed she could think—like other people, because the thoughts of other people had passed through her in tolerable plenty, leaving many a phantom conclusion behind ; but this was *their* thinking, not hers. She had thought no more than was necessary now and then to the persuasion that she saw what a sentence meant, after which her acceptance or rejection of what was contained in it, never more than lukewarm, depended solely upon its relation to what she had somehow or other, she could seldom have told how, come to regard as the proper style of opinion to hold upon things in general.

The social matrix which up to this time had ministered to her development, had some relations with Mayfair, it is true,

but scanty ones indeed with the universe ; so that her present condition was like that of the common bees, every one of which Nature fits for a queen, but its nurses prevent from growing one by providing for it a cell too narrow for the unrolling of royalty, and supplying it with food not potent enough for the nurture of the ideal—with this difference, however, that the cramped and stinted thing comes out, if no queen, then a working bee, and Helen, who might be both, was neither yet. If I were at liberty to mention the books on her table, it would give a few of my readers no small help towards the settling of her position in the "valued file" of the young women of her generation ; but there are reasons against it.

She was the daughter of an officer, who, her mother dying when she was born, committed her to the care of a widowed aunt, and almost immediately left for India, where he rose to high rank, and somehow or other amassed a considerable fortune, partly through his marriage with a Hindoo lady, by whom he had one child, a boy some three years younger than Helen. When he died, he left his fortune equally divided between the two children.

Helen was now three-and-twenty, and her own mistress. Her appearance suggested Norwegian blood, for she was tall, blue-eyed, and dark-haired—but fair-skinned, with regular features, and an over still—some who did not like her said *hard*—expression of countenance. No one had ever called her *Nelly ;* yet she had long remained a girl, lingering on the broken border-land after several of her school companions had become young matrons. Her drawing master, a man of some observation and insight, used to say Miss Lingard would wake up somewhere about forty.

The cause of her so nearly touching the borders of thought this afternoon, was—that she became suddenly aware of feeling bored. Now Helen was even seldomer bored than merry, and this time she saw no reason for it, neither had any person to lay the blame upon. She might have said it was the weather, but the weather had never done it before. Nor could it be want of society, for George Bascombe was

to dine with them. So was the curate, but he did not count for much. Neither was she weary of herself. That, indeed, might be only a question of time, for the most complete egotist, Julius Cæsar, or Napoleon Buonaparte, must at length get weary of his paltry self; but Helen, from the slow rate of her expansion, was not old enough yet. Nor was she in any special sense wrapt up in herself; it was only that she had never yet broken the shell which continues to shut in so many human-chickens, long after they imagine themselves citizens of the real world.

Being somewhat bored then, and dimly aware that to be bored was to be out of harmony with something or other, Helen was on the verge of thinking, but, as I have said, escaped the snare in a very direct and simple fashion: she went fast asleep, and never woke till her maid brought her the cup of kitchen-tea from which the inmates of some houses derive the strength to prepare for dinner.

CHAPTER II.

THOMAS WINGFOLD.

THE morning, whose afternoon was thus stormy, had been fine, and the curate went out for a walk. Had it been just as stormy, however, he would have gone all the same. Not that he was a great walker, or indeed fond of exercise of any sort, and his walking, as an Irishman might say, was half-sitting—on stiles and stones and fallen trees. He was not in bad health, he was not lazy, or given to self-preservation, but he had little impulse to activity of any sort. The springs in his well of life did not seem to flow quite fast enough.

He strolled through Osterfield park, and down the deep descent to the river, where, chilly as it was, he seated himself upon a large stone on the bank, and knew that he was there, and that he had to answer to *Thomas Wingfold;* but why he was there, and why he was not called something else, he did not know. On each side of the stream rose a steeply sloping bank, on which grew many fern-bushes, now half-withered, and the sunlight upon them, this November morning, seemed as cold as the wind that blew about their golden and green fronds. Over a rocky bottom the stream went—talking rather than singing—down the valley towards the town, where it seemed to linger a moment to embrace the old abbey church, before it set out on its leisurely slide through the low level to the sea. Its talk was chilly, and its

ripples, which came half from the obstructions in its channel below, and half from the wind that ruffled it above, were not smiles, but wrinkles rather—even in the sunshine. Thomas felt cold himself, but the cold was of the sort that comes from the look rather than the feel of things. He did not, however, much care how he felt—not enough certainly to have made him put on a great coat : he was not deeply interested in himself. With his stick, a very ordinary bit of oak, he kept knocking pebbles into the water, and listlessly watching them splash. The wind blew, the sun shone, the water ran, the ferns waved, the clouds went drifting over his head—but he never looked up, or took any notice of the doings of Mother Nature at her housework : everything seemed to him to be doing only what it had got to do, because it had got it to do, and not because it cared about it, or had any end in doing it. For he, like every other man, could read nature only by his own lamp, and this was very much how he had hitherto responded to the demands made upon him.

His life had not been a very interesting one, although early passages in it had been painful. He had done fairly well at Oxford : it had been expected of him, and he had answered expectation ; he had not distinguished himself, nor cared to do so. He had known from the first that he was intended for the church, and had not objected, but received it as his destiny—had even, in dim obedience, kept before his mental vision the necessity of yielding to the heights and hollows of the mould into which he was being thrust. But he had taken no great interest in the matter.

The church was to him an ancient institution of such approved respectability that it was able to communicate it, possessing emoluments, and requiring observances. He had entered her service ; she was his mistress, and in return for the narrow shelter, humble fare, and not quite too shabby garments she allotted him, he would perform her hests—in the spirit of a servant who abideth not in the house for ever. He was was now six-and-twenty years of age, and had never dreamed of marriage, or even been troubled with a thought of its unattainable remoteness. He did not philosophise much

upon life, or his position in it, taking everything with a cold, hopeless kind of acceptance, and laying no claim to courage, devotion, or even bare suffering. He had a certain dull prejudice in favour of honesty, would not have told the shadow of a lie to be made archbishop of Canterbury, and yet was so uninstructed in the things that constitute practical honesty that some of his opinions would have considerably astonished St. Paul. He liked reading the prayers, for the making of them vocal in church was pleasant to him, and he had a not unmusical voice. He visited the sick—with some repugnance it is true, but without delay, and spoke to them such religious commonplaces as occurred to him, depending mainly on the prayers belonging to their condition for the right performance of his office. He never thought about being a gentleman, but always behaved like one.

I suspect at this time there lay somewhere in his mind, keeping generally well out of sight however, that is, below the skin of his consciousness, the unacknowledged feeling that he had been hardly dealt with. But at no time even when it rose plainest, would he have dared to add—*by Providence.* Had the temptation come, he would have banished it and the feeling together.

He did not read much, browsed over his newspaper at breakfast with a polite curiosity, sufficient to season the loneliness of his slice of fried bacon, and took more interest in some of the naval intelligence than in anything else. Indeed it would have been difficult for himself even to say in what he did take a large interest. When leisure awoke a question as to how he should employ it, he would generally take up his Horace and read aloud one of his more mournful odes—with such attention to the rhythm, I must add, as, although plentiful enough among scholars in respect of the dead letter, is rarely found with them in respect of the living vocal utterance.

Nor had he now sat long upon his stone, heedless of the world's preparation for winter, before he began repeating to himself the poet's *Æquam memento rebus in arduis,* which he had been trying much, but with small success, to

reproduce in similar English cadences, moved thereto in part by the success of Tennyson in his *O mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies*—a thing as yet alone in the language, so far as I know. It was perhaps a little strange that the curate should draw the strength of which he was most conscious from the pages of a poet whose hereafter was chiefly serviceable to him—in virtue of its unsubstantiality and poverty, the dreamlike thinness of its reality—in enhancing the pleasures of the world of sun and air, cooling shade and songful streams, the world of wine and jest, of forms that melted more slowly from encircling arms, and eyes that did not so swiftly fade and vanish in the distance. Yet when one reflects but for a moment on the poverty-stricken expectations of Christians from their hereafter, I cease to wonder at Wingfold; for human sympathy is lovely and pleasant, and if a Christian priest and a pagan poet feel much in the same tone concerning the affairs of the universe, why should they not comfort each other by sitting down together in the dust?

> "No hair it boots thee whether from Inachus
> Ancient descended, or, of the poorest born,
> Thy being drags, all bare and roofless—
> Victim the same to the heartless Orcus.
>
> All are on one road driven; for each of us
> The urn is tossed, and, later or earlier,
> The lot will drop and all be sentenced
> Into the boat of eternal exile."

Having thus far succeeded with these two stanzas, Wingfold rose, a little pleased with himself, and climbed the bank above him, wading through mingled sun and wind and ferns—so careless of their shivering beauty and their coming exile that a watcher might have said the prospect of one day leaving behind him the shows of this upper world could have no part in the curate's sympathy with Horace.

CHAPTER III.

THE DINERS.

MRS. RAMSHORN, Helen's aunt, was past the middle age of woman; had been handsome and pleasing; had long ceased to be either; had but sparingly recognised the fact, yet had recognised it, and felt aggrieved. Hence in part it was that her mouth had gathered that peevish and wronged expression which tends to produce a moral nausea in the beholder. It she had but known how much uglier in the eyes of her own fellow-mortals her own discontent had made her, than the severest operation of the laws of mortal decay could have done, she might have tried to think less of her wrongs and more of her privileges. As it was, her own face wronged her own heart, which was still womanly, and capable of much pity—seldom exercised. Her husband had been dean of Halystone, a man of sufficient weight of character to have the right influence in the formation of his wife's. He had left her tolerably comfortable as to circumstances, but childless. She loved Helen, whose even imperturbability had by mere weight, as it might seem, gained such a power over her that she was really mistress in the house without either of them knowing it.

Naturally desirous of keeping Helen's fortune in the family, and having, as I say, no son of her own, she had yet not far to look to find a cousin capable, as she might well

imagine, of rendering himself acceptable to the heiress. He was the son of her younger sister, married, like herself, to a dignitary of the church, a canon of a northern cathedral. This youth, therefore, George Bascombe by name, whose visible calling at present was to eat his way to the bar, she often invited to Glaston; and on this Friday afternoon he was on his way from London to spend the Saturday and Sunday with the two ladies. The cousins liked each other, had not had more of each other's society than was favourable to their aunt's designs, who was far too prudent to have made as yet any reference to them, and stood altogether in as suitable a relative position for falling in love with each other as Mrs. Ramshorn could well have desired. Her chief, almost her only, uneasiness arose from the important and but too evident fact that Helen Lingard was not a girl of the sort to fall readily in love. That, however, was of no consequence, provided it did not come in the way of her marrying her cousin, who, her aunt felt confident, was better fitted to rouse her dormant affections than any other youth she had ever seen or was ever likely to see. Upon this occasion she had asked Thomas Wingfold to meet him, partly with the design that he should act as a foil to her nephew, partly in order to do her duty by the church, to which she felt herself belong not as a lay member, but in some undefined professional capacity, in virtue of her departed dean. Wingfold had but lately come to the parish, and, as he was merely curate, she had not been in haste to invite him. On the other hand, he was the only clergyman officiating in the abbey church, which was grand and old, with a miserable living and a non-resident rector. He, to do him justice, paid nearly the amount of the tithes in salary to his curate, and spent the rest on the church material, of which, for certain reasons, he retained the incumbency, the presentation to which belonged to his own family.

The curate presented himself at the dinner-hour in Mrs. Ramshorn's drawing-room, looking like any other gentleman, satisfied with his share in the administration of things, and affecting nothing of the professional either in dress, manner, or tone. Helen saw him for the first time in private life, and,

as she had expected, saw nothing remarkable—a man who looked about thirty, was a little over the middle height, and well enough constructed as men go, had a good forehead, a questionable nose, clear grey eyes, long, mobile, sensitive mouth, large chin, pale complexion, and straight black hair, and might have been a lawyer just as well as a clergyman. A keener—that is, a more interested—eye than hers might have discovered traces of suffering in the forms of the wrinkles which, as he talked, would now and then flit like ripples over his forehead; but Helen's eyes seldom did more than slip over the faces presented to her; and had it been otherwise, who could be expected to pay much regard to Thomas Wingfold when George Bascombe was present? There, indeed, stood a man by the corner of the mantel-piece!—tall and handsome as an Apollo and strong as the young Hercules, dressed in the top of the plainest fashion, self-satisfied, but not offensively so, good-natured, ready to smile, as clean in conscience, apparently, and as large in sympathy, as his shirt-front. Everybody who knew him counted George Bascombe a genuine good fellow, and George himself knew little to the contrary, while Helen knew nothing.

One who had only chanced to get a glimpse of her in her own room, as in imagination my reader has done, would hardly have recognised her again in the drawing-room. For in her own room she was but as she appeared to herself in her mirror—dull, inanimate; but in the drawing-room her reflection from living eyes and presences served to stir up what waking life was in her. When she spoke, her face dawned with a clear, although not warm light; and although it must be owned that when it was at rest, the same overstillness, amounting almost to dulness, the same seeming immobility, ruled as before, yet, even when she was not speaking, the rest was often broken by a smile—a genuine one, for although there was much that was stiff, there was nothing artificial about Helen. Neither was there much of the artificial about her cousin; for his good-nature and his smile, and whatever else appeared upon him, were all genuine enough—the only thing in this respect not quite satisfactory

to the morally fastidious man being his tone in speaking. Whether he had caught it at the university, or amongst his father's clerical friends, or in the professional society he now frequented, I cannot tell, but it had been manufactured somewhere—after a large, scrolly kind of pattern, sounding well-bred and dignified. I wonder how many speak with the voices that really belong to them.

Plainly, to judge from the one Bascombe used, he was accustomed to lay down the law, but in gentlemanly fashion, and not as if he cared a bit about the thing in question himself. By the side of his easy carriage, his broad chest, and towering Greek-shaped head, Thomas Wingfold dwindled almost to vanishing—in a word, looked nobody. And besides his inferiority in size and self-presentment, he had a slight hesitation of manner, which seemed to anticipate, if not to court, the subordinate position which most men, and most women too, were ready to assign him. He said, "*Don't you think?*" far oftener than "*I think*," and was always more ready to fix his attention upon the strong points of an opponent's argument than to reassert his own in slightly altered phrase like most men, or even in fresh forms like a few; hence—self-assertion, either modestly worn like a shirt of fine chain-armour, or gaunt and obtrusive like plates of steel, being the strength of the ordinary man—what could the curate appear but defenceless, therefore weak, and therefore contemptible? The truth is, he had less self-conceit than a mortal's usual share, and was not yet possessed of any opinions interesting enough to himself to seem worth defending with any approach to vivacity.

Bascombe and he bowed in response to their introduction with proper indifference, after a moment's solemn pause exchanged a sentence or two which resembled an exercise in the proper use of a foreign language, and then gave what attention Englishmen are capable of before dinner to the two ladies—the elder of whom, I may just mention, was dressed in black velvet, with heavy Venetian lace, and the younger in black silk with old Honiton. Neither of them did much towards enlivening the conversation. Mrs. Ramshorn, whose

dinner had as yet gained in interest with her years, sat peevishly longing for its arrival, but cast every now and then a look of mild satisfaction upon her nephew, which, however, while it made her eyes sweeter, did not much alter the expression of her mouth. Helen fancied she improved the arrangement of a few greenhouse flowers in an ugly vase on the table.

At length the butler appeared, the curate took Mrs. Ramshorn, and the cousins followed—making, in the judgment of the butler as he stood in the hall and the housekeeper as she peered from the baize-covered door that led to the still-room, as handsome a couple as mortal eyes need wish to see. They looked nearly of an age, the lady the more stately, the gentleman the more graceful, or, perhaps rather, *elegant*, of the two.

CHAPTER IV.

THEIR TALK.

DURING dinner Bascombe had the talk mostly to himself, and rattled well, occasionally rebuked by his aunt for some remark which might to a clergyman appear objectionable; nor as a partisan was she altogether satisfied with the curate that he did not seem inclined to take clerical exception. He ate his dinner, quietly responding to Bascombe's sallies—which had usually more of vivacity than keenness, more of good spirits than wit—with a curious flickering smile or a single word of agreement. It might have seemed that he was humouring a younger man, but the truth was the curate had not yet seen cause for opposing him.

How any friend could have come to send Helen poetry I cannot imagine, but that very morning she had received by post a small volume of verse, which, although just out, and by an unknown author, had already been talked of in what are called literary circles. Wingfold had read some extracts from the book that same morning, and was therefore not quite unprepared when Helen asked him if he had seen it. He suggested that the poems, if the few lines he had seen made a fair sample, were rather of the wailful order.

"If there is one thing I despise more than another," said Bascombe, "it is to hear a man, a fellow with legs and arms, pour out his griefs into the bosom of that most discreet of

confidantes, Society, bewailing his hard fate, and calling upon youths and maidens to fill their watering-pots with tears, and with him water the sorrowful pansies and undying rue of the race. I believe I am quoting."

"I think you must be, George," said Helen. "I never knew you venture so near the edge of poetry before."

"Ah, that is all you know of me, Miss Lingard!" returned Bascombe. "—And then," he resumed, turning again to Wingfold, "what is it they complain of? That some girl preferred a better man, perhaps, or that a penny paper once told the truth about their poetry."

"Or it may be only that it is their humour to be sad," said Wingfold. "But don't you think," he continued, "it is hardly worth while to be indignant with them? Their verses are a relief to them, and do nobody any harm."

"They do all the boys and girls harm that read them, and themselves who write them more harm than anybody, confirming them in tearful habits, and teaching eyes unused to weep. I quote again, I believe, but from whom I am innocent.—If I ever had a grief, I should have along with it the decency to keep it to myself."

"I don't doubt you would, George," said his cousin, who seemed more playfully inclined than usual. "But," she added, with a smile, "would your silence be voluntary or enforced?"

"What!" returned Bascombe, "you think I could not plain my woes to the moon? Why not I as well as another? I could roar you as 'twere any nightingale."

"You have had your sorrows, then, George?"

"Never anything worse yet than a tailor's bill, Helen, and I hope you won't provide me with any. I am not in love with decay.—I remember a fellow at Trinity, the merriest of all our set at a wine-party, who, alone with his ink-pot, was for ever enacting the part of the unheeded poet, complaining of the hard hearts and tuneless ears of his generation. I went into his room once, and found him with the tears running down his face, a pot of stout half empty on the table, and his den all but opaque with tobacco-smoke,

reciting with sobs—I had repeated the lines so often before they ceased to amuse me that I can never forget them—

'Heard'st thou a quiver and clang?
In thy sleep did it make thee start?
'Twas a chord in twain that sprang—
But the lyre-shell was my heart.'

He took a pull at the stout, laid his head on the table, and sobbed like a locomotive."

"But it's not very bad—not bad at all, so far as I see," said Helen, who had a woman's weakness for the side attacked, in addition to a human partiality for fair play.

"No, not bad at all—for absolute nonsense," said Bascombe.

"He had been reading Heine," said Wingfold.

"And burlesquing him," returned Bascombe. "Fancy hearing one of the fellow's heart-strings crack, and taking it for a string of his fiddle in the press. By the way, what are the heart-strings? Have they any anatomical synonym? But I have no doubt it was good poetry."

"Do you think poetry and common sense necessarily opposed to each other?" asked Wingfold.

"I confess a leaning to that opinion," replied Bascombe, with a half-conscious smile.

"What do you say of Horace, now?" suggested Wingfold.

"Unfortunately, for me, you have mentioned the one poet for whom I have any respect. But what I like in him is just his common sense. He never cries over spilt milk, even if the jug be broken to the bargain. But common sense would be just as good in prose as in verse."

"Possibly; but what we have of it in Horace would never have reached us but for the forms into which he has cast it. How much more enticing acorns in the cup are!—I was watching two children picking them up to-day."

"That may be; there have always been more children than grown men," returned Bascombe. "For my part I would sweep away all illusions, and get at the heart of the affair."

"But," said Wingfold, with the look of one who, as he tries to say it, is seeing a thing for the first time, "does not the acorn-cup belong to the acorn? May not some of what you call illusions be the finer, or at least more ethereal, qualities of the thing itself? You do not object to music in church, for instance?"

Bascombe was on the point of saying that he objected to it nowhere except in church, but for his aunt's sake or rather for his own sake in his aunt's eyes, he restrained himself, and uttered his feelings only in a peculiar smile, of import so mingled that its meaning was illegible ere it had quivered along his lip and vanished.

"I am no metaphysician," he said, and Wingfold accepted the dismissal of the subject.

Little passed between the two men over their wine; and as neither of them cared to drink more than a couple of glasses, they soon rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Ramshorn was taking her usual forty winks in her arm-chair, and their entrance did not disturb her. Helen was turning over some music.

"I am looking for a song for you, George," she said. "I want Mr. Wingfold to hear you sing, lest he should take you for a man of stone and lime."

"Never mind looking," returned her cousin. "I will sing one you have never heard."

And seating himself at the piano, he sang the following verses. They were his own, a fact he would probably have allowed to creep out had they met with more sympathy. His voice was a fine bass one, full of tone.

"Each man has his lampful, his lampful of oil;
He may dull its glimmer with sorrow and toil;
He may leave it unlit, and let it dry,
Or wave it aloft, and hold it high;
For mine, it shall burn with a fearless flame
In the front of the darkness that has no name.

"Sunshine and Wind!—are ye there? Ho! ho!
Are ye comrades or lords, as ye shine and blow?

I care not, I ! I will lift my head
Till ye shine and blow on my grassy bed.
See, brother Sun, I am shining too !
Wind, I am living as well as you !

" Though the sun go out like a vagrant spark,
And his daughter planets are left in the dark,
I care not, I ! For why should I care ?
I shall be hurtless, nor here nor there.
Sun and Wind, let us shine and shout,
For the day draws nigh when we all go out ! "

" I don't like the song," said Helen, wrinkling her brows a little. " It sounds—well, heathenish."

She would, I fear, have said nothing of the sort, being used to that kind of sound from her cousin, had not a clergyman been present. Yet she said it from no hypocrisy, but simple regard for his professional feelings.

" I sang it for Mr. Wingfold," returned Bascombe. " It would have been a song after Horace's own heart."

" Don't you think," rejoined the curate, " the defiant tone of your song would have been strange to him ? I confess that what I find chiefly attractive in Horace is his sad submission to the inevitable."

" Sad ? " echoed Bascombe.

" Don't you think so ? "

" No. He makes the best of it, and as merrily as he can."

" *As he can.* I grant you," said Wingfold.

Here Mrs. Ramshorn woke, and the subject was dropped, leaving Mr. Wingfold in some perplexity as to this young man and his talk, and what the phenomenon signified. Was heathenism after all secretly cherished, and about to become fashionable in English society ? He saw little of its phases, and for what he knew it might be so.

Helen sat down at the piano. Her time was perfect, and she never blundered a note. She played well and woodenly, and had for her reward a certain wooden satisfaction in her own performance. The music she chose was good of its kind, but had more to do with the instrument than the feelings, and was more dependent upon execution than

expression. Bascombe yawned behind his handkerchief, and Wingfold gazed at the profile of the player, wondering how, with such fine features and complexion, with such a fine-shaped and well-set head, her face should be so far short of interesting. It seemed a face that had no story.

CHAPTER V.

A STAGGERING QUESTION.

IT was time the curate should take his leave. Bascombe would go out with him and have his last cigar. The wind had fallen, and the moon was shining. A vague sense of contrast came over Wingfold, and as he stepped on the pavement from the threshold of the high gates of wrought iron, he turned involuntarily and looked back at the house. It was of red brick, and flat-faced, in the style of Queen Anne's time, so that the light could do nothing with it in the way of shadow, and dwelt only on the dignity of its unpretentiousness. But aloft over its ridge the moon floated in the softest, loveliest blue, with just a cloud here and there to show how blue it was, and a sparkle where its blueness took fire in a star. It was autumn, almost winter, below, and the creepers that clung to the house waved in the now gentle wind like the straggling tresses of old age ; but above was a sky that might have overhung the last melting of spring into summer. At the end of the street rose the great square tower of the church, seeming larger than in the daylight. There was something in it all that made the curate feel there ought to be more—as if the night knew something he did not ; and he yielded himself to its invasion.

His companion having carefully lighted his cigar all round its extreme periphery, took it from his mouth, regarded its

glowing end with a smile of satisfaction, and burst into a laugh. It was not a scornful laugh, neither was it a merry or a humorous laugh : it was one of satisfaction and amusement.

"Let me have a share in the fun," said the curate.

"You have it," said his companion—rudely, indeed, but not quite offensively, and put his cigar in his mouth again.

Wingfold was not one to take umbrage easily. He was not important enough in his own eyes for that, but he did not choose to go farther.

"That's a fine old church," he said, pointing to the dark mass invading the blue—so solid, yet so clear in outline.

"I am glad the mason-work is to your mind," returned Bascombe, almost compassionately. "It must be some satisfaction, perhaps consolation, to you."

Before he had thus concluded the sentence a little scorn had crept into his tone.

"You make some allusion which I do not quite apprehend," said the curate.

"Now, I am going to be honest with you," said Bascombe abruptly, and stopping, he turned square towards his companion, and took the full-flavoured Havana from his lips. "I like you," he went on, "for you seem reasonable ; and besides, a man ought to speak out what he thinks. So here goes ! Tell me honestly—do you believe one word of all that ?"

And he in his turn pointed in the direction of the great tower.

The curate was taken by surprise, and made no answer ; it was as if he had received a sudden blow in the face. Recovering himself presently, however, he sought room to pass the question without direct encounter.

"How came the thing there ?" he said, once more indicating the church-tower.

"By faith, no doubt," answered Bascombe, laughing, "—but not your faith ; no, nor the faith of any of the last few generations."

"There are more churches built now, ten times over, than in any former period of our history."

"True; but of what sort? All imitation—never an original amongst them all!"

"If they had found out the right way, why change it?"

"Good! But it is rather ominous for the claim of a divine origin to your religion that it should be the only thing that in these days takes the crab's move—backwards. You are indebted to your forefathers for your would-be belief, as well as for their genuine churches. You hardly know what your belief is. There is my aunt—as good a specimen as I know of what you call a Christian!—so accustomed is she to think and speak too after the forms of what you heard my cousin call heathenism, that she never would have discovered, had she been as wide awake as she was sound asleep, that the song I sung was anything but a good Christian ballad."

"Pardon me; I think you are wrong there."

"What! did you never remark how these Christian people, who profess to believe that their great man has conquered death, and all that rubbish—did you never observe the way they look if the least allusion is made to death, or the eternity they say they expect beyond it? Do they not stare as if you had committed a breach of manners? Religion itself the same way: as much as you like about the church, but don't mention Christ! At the same time, to do them justice, it is only of death in the abstract they decline to hear; they will listen to the news of the death of a great and good man without any such emotion. Look at the poetry of death—I mean the way Christian poets write of it! A dreamless sleep they call it—the bourne from whence, etc. —an endless separation—the night that knows no morning —the sleep that knows no waking. 'She is gone for ever!' cries the mother over her daughter. And that is why such things are not to be mentioned, because in their hearts they have no hope, and in their minds no courage to face the facts of existence. We haven't the pluck of the old fellows, who, that they might look Death himself in the face without dismay, accustomed themselves, even at their banquets, to

the sight of his most loathsome handiwork, his most significant symbol—and enjoyed their wine the better for it!—your friend Horace, for instance."

"But your aunt now would never consent to such an interpretation of her opinions. Nor do I allow that it is fair."

"My dear sir, if there is one thing I pride myself upon, it is fair play, and I grant you at once she would not. But I am speaking, not of creeds, but of beliefs. And I assert that the forms of common Christian speech regarding death come nearer those of Horace than your saint, the old Jew, Saul of Tarsus."

It did not occur to Wingfold that people generally speak from the surfaces, not the depths of their minds, even when those depths are moved; nor yet that possibly Mrs. Ramshorn was not the best type of a Christian, even in his soft-walking congregation. In fact, nothing came into his mind with which to meet what Bascombe said—the real force whereof he could not help feeling—and he answered nothing. His companion followed his apparent yielding with fresh pressure.

"In truth," he said, "I do not believe that *you* believe more than an atom here and there of what you profess. I am confident you have more good sense by a great deal."

"I am sorry to find that you place good sense above good faith, Mr. Bascombe; but I am obliged by your good opinion, which, as I read it, amounts to this—that I am one of the greatest humbugs you have the misfortune to be acquainted with."

"Ha! ha! ha! No, no; I don't say that. I know so well how to make allowance for the prejudices a man has inherited from foolish ancestors, and which have been instilled into him, as well, with his earliest nourishment, both bodily and mentally. But—come now—I do love open dealing—I am myself open as the day—did you not take to the church as a profession, in which you might eat a piece of bread—as somebody says in your own blessed Bible—dry

enough bread it may be, for the old lady is not over-generous to her younger children—still a gentlemanly sort of livelihood?"

Wingfold held his peace. It was incontestably with such a view that he had signed the articles and sought holy orders,—and that without a single question as to truth or reality in either act.

"Your silence is honesty, Mr. Wingfold, and I honour you for it," said Bascombe. "It is an easy thing for a man in another profession to speak his mind, but silence such as yours, casting a shadow backward over your past, requires courage: I honour you, sir."

As he spoke, he laid his hand on Wingfold's shoulder with the grasp of an athlete.

"Can the sherry have anything to do with it?" thought the curate. The fellow was, or seemed to be, years younger than himself! It was an assurance unimaginable—yet there it stood—six feet of it good! He glanced at the church-tower. It had not vanished in mist! It still made its own strong, clear mark on the eternal blue!

"I must not allow you to mistake my silence, Mr. Bascombe," he answered the same moment. "It is not easy to reply to such demands all at once. It is not easy to say in times like these, and at a moment's notice, what or how much a man believes. But whatever my answer might be had I time to consider it, my silence must at least not be interpreted to mean that I do *not* believe as my profession indicates. That, at all events, would be untrue."

"Then I am to understand, Mr. Wingfold, that you neither believe nor disbelieve the tenets of the church whose bread you eat?" said Bascombe, with the air of a reprover of sin.

"I decline to place myself between the horns of any such dilemma," returned Wingfold, who was now more than a little annoyed at his persistency in forcing his way within the precincts of another's personality.

"It is but one more proof—more than was necessary—to

convince me that the whole system is a lie—a lie of the worst sort, seeing it may prevail even to the self-deception of a man otherwise remarkable for honesty and directness. Good-night, Mr. Wingfold."

With lifted hats, but no hand-shaking, the men parted.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CURATE IN THE CHURCHYARD.

BASCOMBE was chagrined to find that the persuasive eloquence with which he hoped soon to play upon the convictions of jurymen at his own sweet will had not begotten even communicativeness, not to say confidence, in the mind of a parson who knew himself fooled, and partly that it gave him cause to doubt how far it might be safe to urge his attack in another and to him more important quarter. He had a passion for convincing people, this Hercules of the new world. He sauntered slowly back to his aunt's, husbanding his cigar a little, and looking up at the moon now and then,—not to admire the marvel of her shining, but to think yet again what a fit type of an effete superstition she was, in that she retained her power of fascination even in death.

Wingfold walked slowly away, with his eyes on the ground gliding from under his footsteps. It was only eleven o'clock, but this the oldest part of the town seemed already asleep. They had not met a single person on their way, and hardly seen a lighted window. But he felt unwilling to go home, which at first he was fain to attribute to his having drunk a little more wine than was good for him, whence this feverishness and restlessness so strange to his experience. . In the churchyard, on the other side of which his lodging lay, he

turned aside from the flagged path and sat down upon a gravestone, where he was hardly seated ere he began to discover that it was something else than the wine which had made him feel so uncomfortable. What an objectionable young fellow that Bascombe was!—presuming and arrogant to a degree rare, he hoped, even in a profession for which insolence was a qualification. What rendered it worse was that his good-nature—and indeed every one of his gifts, which were all of the popular order—was subservient to an assumption not only self-satisfied but obtrusive! And yet—and yet—the objectionable character of his self-constituted judge being clear as the moon to the mind of the curate, was there not something in what he had said? This much remained undeniable at least, that when the very existence of the church was denounced as a humbug in the hearing of one who ate her bread, and was her pledged servant, his very honesty had kept that man from speaking a word in her behalf! Something must be wrong somewhere: was it in him or in the church? In him assuredly, whether in her or not. For had he not been unable to utter the simple assertion that he did believe the things which, as the mouth-piece of the church, he had been speaking in the name of the truth every Sunday—would again speak the day after to-morrow? And now the point was—*why* could he not say he believed them? He had never consciously questioned them; he did not question them now; and yet, when a forward, overbearing young infidel of a lawyer put it to him—plump—as if he were in the witness-box, or rather indeed in the dock—did he believe a word of what the church had set him to teach?—a strange something—was it honesty?—if so, how dishonest had he not hitherto been!—was it diffidence?—if so, how presumptuous his position in that church!—this nondescript something seemed to raise a "viewless obstruction" in his throat, and, having thus rendered him the first moment incapable of speaking out like a man, had taught him the next—had it?—to quibble—"like a priest," the lawyer-fellow would doubtless have said! He must go home and study Paley—or perhaps

Butler's Analogy—he owed the church something, and ought to be able to strike a blow for her. Or would not Leighton be better? Or a more modern writer—say Neander, or Coleridge, or perhaps Dr. Liddon? There were thousands able to fit him out for the silencing of such foolish men as this Bascombe of the shirt-front!

Wingfold found himself filled with contempt, but the next moment was not sure whether this Bascombe or one Wingfold were the more legitimate object of it. One thing was undeniable—his friends *had* put him into the priest's office, and he had yielded to go that he might eat a piece of bread. He had no love for it except by fits, when the beauty of an anthem, or the composition of a collect, awoke in him a faint consenting admiration or a weak responsive sympathy. Did he not, indeed, sometimes despise himself, and that pretty heartily, for earning his bread by work which any pious old woman could do better than he? True, he attended to his duties; not merely "did church," but his endeavour also that all things should be done decently and in order. All the same it remained a fact that if Barrister Bascombe were to stand up and assert in full congregation—as no doubt he was perfectly prepared to do—that there was no God anywhere in the universe, the Rev. Thomas Wingfold could not, on the church's part, prove to anybody that there was;—dared not, indeed, so certain would he be of discomfiture, advance a single argument on his side of the question. Was it even *his* side of the question? Could he say he believed there was a God? Or was not this all he knew—that there was a Church of England, which paid him for reading public prayers to a God in whom the congregation—and himself—were supposed by some to believe, by others, Bascombe, for instance, not?

These reflections were not pleasant, especially with Sunday so near. For what if there were hundreds, yes thousands of books, triumphantly settling every question which an over-seething and ill-instructed brain might by any chance suggest,—what could it boot?—how was a poor finite mortal, with much the ordinary faculty and capacity,

and but a very small stock already stored, to set about reading, studying, understanding, mastering, appropriating the contents of those thousands of volumes necessary to the arming of him who, without pretending himself the mighty champion to seek the dragon in his den, might yet hope not to let the loathly worm swallow him, armour and all, at one gulp in the highway? Add to this that—thought of all most dismayful!—he had himself to convince first, the worst dragon of all to kill, for bare honesty's sake, in his own field; while, all the time he was arming and fighting—like the waves of the flowing tide in a sou'-wester, Sunday came in upon Sunday, roaring on his flat, defenceless shore, Sunday behind Sunday rose towering in awful perspective, away to the verge of an infinite horizon—Sunday after Sunday of dishonesty and sham—yes, hypocrisy, far worse than any idolatry. To begin now, and in such circumstances, to study the evidences of Christianity, were about as reasonable as to send a man, whose children were crying for their dinner, off to China to make his fortune!

He laughed the idea to scorn, discovered that a gravestone in a November midnight was a cold chair for study, rose, stretched himself disconsolately, almost despairingly, looked long at the persistent solidity of the dark church and the waving line of its age-slackened ridge, which, like a mountain range, shot up suddenly in the tower and ceased—then turning away left the houses of the dead crowded all about the house of the resurrection. At the farther gate he turned yet again, and gazed another moment on the tower. Towards the sky it towered, and led his gaze upward. There still soared, yet rested, the same quiet night with its delicate heaps of transparent blue, its cool glowing moon, its steely stars, and its something he did not understand. He went home a little quieter of heart, as if he had heard from afar something sweet and strange.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COUSINS.

GEORGE BASCOMBE was a peculiar development of the present century, almost of the present generation. In the last century, beyond a doubt, the description of such a man would have been incredible. I do not mean that he was the worse or the better for that. There are types both of good and of evil which to the past would have been incredible because unintelligible.

It is very hard sometimes for a tolerably honest man, as we have just seen in the case of Wingfold, to say what he believes, and it ought to be yet harder to say what another man does not believe; therefore I shall presume no further concerning Bascombe in this respect than to say that the thing he *seemed* most to believe was that he had a mission to destroy the beliefs of everybody else. Whence he derived this mission he would not have thought a reasonable question—would have answered that if any man knew any truth unknown to another, understood any truth better, or could present it more clearly than another, the truth itself was his commission of apostleship. And his stand was indubitably a firm one. Only there was the question—whether his presumed commission was verily truth or no. It must be allowed that a good deal turns upon that.

According to the judgment of some men who thought

they knew him, Bascombe was as yet, I will not say incapable of distinguishing, but careless of the distinction between—not a fact and a law, perhaps, but a law and a truth. They said also that he inveighed against the beliefs of other people, without having ever seen more than a distorted shadow of those beliefs—some of them he was not capable of seeing, they said—only capable of denying. Now while he would have been perfectly justified, they said, in asserting that he saw no truth in the things he denied, was he justifiable in concluding that his not seeing a thing was a proof of its non-existence—anything more, in fact, than a presumption against its existence? or in denouncing every man who said he believed this or that which Bascombe did not believe, as either a knave or a fool if not both in one? He would, they said, judge anybody—a Shakespeare, a Bacon, a Milton, without a moment's hesitation or a quiver of reverence—judge men who beside him were as the living ocean to a rose-diamond. If he was armed in honesty, the rivets were of self-satisfaction. The suit, they allowed, was adamantine, unpierceable.

That region of a man's nature which has to do with the unknown was in Bascombe shut off by a wall without chink or cranny; he was unaware of its existence. He had come out of the darkness, and was going back into the darkness; all that lay between, plain and clear, he had to do with—nothing more. He could not present to himself the idea of a man who found it impossible to live without some dealings with the supernal. To him a man's imagination was of no higher calling than to amuse him with its vagaries. He did not know, apparently, that Imagination had been the guide to all the physical discoveries which he worshipped, therefore could not reason that perhaps she might be able to carry a glimmering light even into the forest of the supersensible.

How far he was original in the views he propounded will, to those who understand the times of which I write, be plain enough. The lively reception of another man's doctrine, especially if it comes over water or across a few ages of

semi-oblivion, and has to be gathered with occasional help from a dictionary, raises many a man, in his own esteem, to the same rank with its first propounder ; after which he will propound it so heartily himself as to forget the difference, and love it as his own child.

It may seem strange that the son of a clergyman should take such a part in the world's affairs, but one who observes will discover that, at college at least, the behaviour of sons of clergymen resembles in general as little as that of any, and less than that of most, the behaviour enjoined by the doctrines their fathers have to teach. The cause of this is matter for the consideration of those fathers. In Bascombe's case it must be mentioned, also, that instead of taking freedom from prejudice as a portion of the natural accomplishment of a gentleman, he prided himself upon it, and *therefore* would often go dead against the things presumed to be held by *the cloth*, long before he had begun to take his position as an iconoclast.

Lest I should, however, tire my reader with the delineation of a character not of the most interesting, I shall, for the present, only add that Bascombe had persuaded himself, and without much difficulty, that he was one of the prophets of a new order of things. At Cambridge he had been so regarded by a few who had lauded him as a mighty foe to humbug—and in some true measure he deserved the praise. Since then he had found a larger circle, and had even radiated of his light, such as it was, from the centres of London editorial offices. But all I have to do with now is the fact that he had grown desirous to add his cousin, Helen Lingard, to the number of those who believed in him, and over whom, therefore, he exercised a prophet's influence.

No doubt it added much to the attractiveness of the intellectual game that the hunt was on the home grounds of such a proprietress as Helen—a handsome, a gifted, and, above all, a lady-like young woman. To do Bascombe justice, the fact that she was an heiress also had very little weight in the matter. If he had ever had any thought of marrying her, that thought was not consciously present to

him when first he became aware of his wish to convert her to his views of life. But although he was not in love with her, he admired her, and believed he saw in her one that resembled himself.

As to Helen, although she was no more conscious of cause of self-dissatisfaction than her cousin, she was not therefore positively self-satisfied like him. For that her mind was not active enough.

If it seem, as it may, to some of my readers, difficult to believe that she should have come to her years without encountering any questions, giving life to any aspirations, or even forming any opinions that could rightly be called her own, I would remind them that she had always had good health, and that her intellectual faculties had been kept in full and healthy exercise, nor had once afforded the suspicion of a tendency towards artistic utterance in any direction. She was no mere dabbler in anything: in music, for instance, she had studied thorough bass, and studied it well; yet her playing was such as I have already described it. She understood perspective, and could copy an etching in pen and ink to a hair's breadth, yet her drawing was hard and mechanical. She was pretty much at home in Euclid, and thoroughly enjoyed a geometric relation, but had never yet shown her English master the slightest pleasure in an analogy, or the smallest sympathy with any poetry higher than such as very properly delights schoolboys. Ten thousand things she knew without wondering at one of them. Any attempt to rouse her admiration she invariably received with quiet intelligence but no response. Yet her drawing-master was convinced there lay a large soul asleep somewhere below the calm gray morning of that wide-awake yet reposeful intelligence. As far as she knew—only she had never thought anything about it—she was in harmony with creation animate and inanimate, and for what might or might not be above creation, or at the back, or the heart, or the mere root of it, how could she think about a something the idea of which had never yet been presented to her by love or philosophy or even curiosity? As for any influence from the

public offices of religion, a contented soul may glide through them all for a long life, unstruck to the last, buoyant and evasive as a bee amongst hailstones. And now her cousin, unsolicited, was about to assume, if she should permit him, the unspiritual direction of her being, so that she need never be troubled from the quarter of the unknown.

Mrs. Ramshorn's house had formerly been the manor-house, and although it now stood in an old street, with only a few yards of ground between it and the road, it had a large and ancient garden behind it. A large garden of any sort is valuable, but an ancient garden is invaluable, and this one had retained a very antique loveliness. The quaint memorials of its history lived on into the new, changed, unsympathetic time, and stood there, aged, modest, and unabashed. Yet not one of the family had ever cared for it on the ground of its old-fashionedness ; its preservation was owing merely to the fact that their gardener was blessed with a wholesome stupidity rendering him incapable of unlearning what his father, who had been gardener there before him, had had marvellous difficulty in teaching him. We do not half appreciate the benefits to the race that spring from honest dulness. The *clever* people are the ruin of everything.

Into this garden Bascombe walked the next morning, after breakfast, and Helen, who, next to the smell of a fir-wood fire, honestly liked the odour of a good cigar, spying him from her balcony, which was the roof of the veranda, where she was trimming the few remaining chrysanthemums that stood outside the window of her room, ran down the little wooden stair that led from it to the garden, and joined him. Nothing could just at present have been more to his mind.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GARDEN.

"TAKE a cigar, Helen?" said George.

"No, thank you," answered Helen; "I like it diluted."

"I don't see why ladies should not have things strong as well as men."

"Not if they don't want them. You can't enjoy every thing—I mean, one can't have the strong and the delicate both at once. I don't believe a smoker can have the same pleasure in smelling a rose that I have."

"Isn't it a pity we never can compare sensations?"

"I don't think it matters much: every one would have to keep to his own after all."

"That's good, Helen! If ever man try to humbug you, he will find he has lost his stirrups. If only there were enough like you left in this miserable old hulk of a creation!"

It was an odd thing that when in the humour of finding fault, Bascombe would not unfrequently speak of the cosmos as a creation. He was himself unaware of the curious fact.

"You seem to have a standing quarrel with the creation, George! Yet one might think you had as little ground as most people to complain of your portion in it," said Helen.

"Well, you know, I don't complain for myself. I don't pretend to think I am specially ill used. But I am not everybody. And then there's such a lot of born fools in it!"

"If they are born fools they can't help it."

"That may be; only it makes it none the pleasanter for other people; but, unfortunately, they are not the only or the worst sort of fools. For one born fool there are a thousand wilful ones. For one man that will honestly face an honest argument, there are ten thousand that will dishonestly shirk it. There's that curate-fellow now—Wingfold I think aunt called him—look at him now!"

"I can't see much in him to rouse indignation," said Helen. "He seems a very inoffensive man."

"I don't call it inoffensive when a man sells himself to the keeping up of a system that—"

Here Bascombe checked himself, remembering that a sudden attack upon what was at least, the more was the pity, a time-honoured system might rouse a woman's prejudices; and as Helen had already listened to a large amount of undermining remark without perceiving the direction of his tunnels, he resolved, before venturing an open assault, to make sure that those prejudices stood, lightly borne, over an abyss of seething objection. He had had his experiences as the prophet-pioneer of glad tidings to the nations, and had before now, although such weakness he could not anticipate in Helen, seen one whom he considered a most promising pupil turn suddenly away in a storm of terror and disgust.

"What a folly is it now," he instantly resumed, leaving the general and attacking a particular, "to think to make people good by promises and threats—promises of a heaven that would bore the dullest among them to death, and threats of a hell the very idea of which, if only half conceived, would be enough to paralyse every nerve of healthy action in the human system!"

"All nations have believed in a future state, either of reward or punishment," objected Helen.

"Mere Brocken-spectres of their own approbation or disapprobation of themselves. And whither has it brought the race?"

"What then would you substitute for it, George?"

"Why substitute anything? Ought not men to be good to one another because they are made up of ones and others? Do you or I need threats and promises to make us kind? And what right have we to judge others worse than ourselves? Mutual compassion," he went on, blowing out a mouthful of smoke and then swelling his big chest with a huge lungsful of air, "might be sufficient to teach poor ephemerals kindness and consideration enough to last their time."

"But how would you bring such reflections to bear?" asked Helen, pertinently.

"I would reason thus: You must consider that you are but a part of the whole, and that whatever you do to hurt the whole, or injure any of its parts, will return upon you who form one of those parts."

"How would that influence the man whose favourite amusement is to beat his wife?"

"Not at all, I grant you. But that man is what he is from being born and bred under a false and brutal system. Having deluged his delicate brain with the poisonous fumes of adulterated liquor, and so roused all the terrors of a phantom-haunted imagination, he sees hostile powers above watching for his fall, and fiery ruin beneath gaping to receive him, and in pure despair acts like the madman the priests and the publicans have made him. Helen," continued Bascombe with solemnity, regarding her fixedly, "to deliver the race from the horrors of such falsehoods, which by no means operate only on the vulgar and brutal, for to how many of the most refined and delicate of human beings are not their lives rendered bitter by the evil suggestions of lying systems—I care not what they are called—philosophy, religion, society, I care not!—to deliver men, I say, from such ghouls of the human brain, were indeed to have lived! and in the consciousness of having spent his life in

the slaying of such dragons, a man may well go from the nameless past into the nameless future rejoicing, careless even if his poor length of days be shortened by his labours to leave blessing behind him, and, full of courage even in the moment of final dissolution, cast her mockery back into the face of mocking Life, and die her enemy and the friend of Death!"

George's language was a little confused. Perhaps he mingled his ideas a little for Helen's sake—or rather for obscurity's sake. Anyhow, the mournful touch in it was not his own, but taken from the poems of certain persons whose opinions resembled his, but floated on the surface of mighty and sad hearts. Tall, stately, comfortable Helen walked composedly by his side, softly shared his cigar, and thought what a splendid pleader he would make. Perhaps to her it sounded rather finer than it was, for its tone of unselfishness, the aroma of self-devotion that floated about it, pleased and attracted her. Was not here a youth in the prime of being and the dawn of success, handsome, and smoking the oldest of Havanas, who, so far from being enamoured of his own existence, was anxious and careful about that of less-favoured mortals, for whose welfare indeed he was willing to sacrifice his life?—nothing less could be what he meant. And how fine he looked as he said it, with his head erect and his nostrils quivering like those of a horse! For his honesty, that was self-evident!

Perhaps, had she been capable of looking into it, the self-evident honesty might have resolved itself into this—that he thoroughly believed in himself; that he meant what he said; and that he offered her nothing he did not prize and cleave to as his own.

To one who had read Darwin, and had chanced to see them as they walked in their steady, stately young life among the ancient cedars and clipped yews of the garden, with the rags and tatters of the ruined summer hanging over and around them, they must have looked as fine an instance of natural selection as the world had to show. And now in truth for the first time, with any shadow of purpose, that is,

did the thought of Helen as a wife occur to Bascombe. She listened so well, was so ready to take what he presented to her, was evidently so willing to become a pupil, that he began to say to himself that here was the very woman made —no, not made, that implied a maker—but for him, without the *made;* that is, if ever he should bring himself by marriage to limit the freedom to which man, the crown of the world, the blossom of nature, the cauliflower of the spine, was predestined or doomed, without will in himself or beyond himself, from an eternity of unthinking matter, ever producing what was better than itself, in the prolific darkness of of non-intent.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PARK.

AT the bottom of Mrs. Ramshorn's garden was a deep sunk fence, which allowed a large meadow, a fragment of what had once been the manor-park, to belong, so far as the eye was concerned, to the garden. Nor was this all, for in the sunk fence was a door with a little tunnel, by which they could pass at once from the garden to the meadow. So, the day being wonderfully fine, Bascombe proposed to his cousin a walk in the park, the close-paling of which, with a small door in it, whereto Mrs. Ramshorn had the privilege of a key, was visible on the other side of the meadow. The two keys had but to be fetched from the house, and in a few minutes they were in the park. The turf was dry, the air was still, and although the woods were very silent, and looked mournfully bare, the grass drew nearer to the roots of the trees, and the sunshine filled them with streaks of gold, blending lovelily with the bright green of the moss that patched the older stems. Neither horses nor dogs say to themselves, I suppose, that the sunshine makes them glad, yet both are happier, after the rules of equine and canine existence, on a bright day : neither Helen nor George could have understood a poem of Keats—not to say Wordsworth—(I do not mean they would not have fancied they did)—and yet the soul of nature that dwelt in

these common shows did not altogether fail of influence upon them.

"I wonder what the birds do with themselves all the winter," said Helen.

"Eat berries, and make the best of it," answered George.

"I mean what becomes of them all. We see so few of them."

"About as many as you see in summer. Because you hear them you fancy you see them."

"But there is so little to hide them in winter."

"Little is wanted to hide our dusky creatures."

"They must have a hard time of it in frost and snow."

"Oh, I don't know," returned George. "They enjoy life on the whole, I believe. It ain't such a very bad sort of a world as some people would have it. Nature is cruel enough in some of her arrangements, it can't be denied. She don't scruple to carry out her plans. It is nothing to her that for the life of one great monster of a high-priest millions upon millions of submissive little fishes should be sacrificed; and then if anybody come within the teeth of her machinery, don't she mangle him finely—with her fevers and her agues and her convulsions and consumptions and what not? But still, barring her own necessities, and the consequences of man's ignorance and foolhardiness, she is on the whole rather a good-natured old woman, and scatters a deal of tolerably fair enjoyment around her."

"One *would* think the birds must be happy in summer at least, to hear them sing," corroborated Helen.

"Yes, or to see them stripping a hawthorn bush in winter—always provided the cat or the hawk don't get a hold of them. With that nature does not trouble herself. Well, it's soon over—with all of us, and that's a comfort. If men would only get rid of their cats and hawks—such as the fancy, for instance, that all their suffering comes of the will of a malignant power! That is the kind of thing that makes the misery of the world!"

"I don't quite see—" began Helen.

"We were talking about the birds in winter," interrupted George, careful not to swell too suddenly any of the air-bags

with which he would float Helen's belief. He knew wisely and he knew how, to leave a hint to work while it was yet not half understood. By the time it was understood it would have grown a little familiar: the supposed pup when it turned out a cub would not be so terrible as if it had presented itself at once as leonate.

And so they wandered across the park, talking easily.

"They've got on a good way since I was here last," said George, as they came in sight of the new house the new earl was building. "But they don't seem much in a hurry with it either."

"Aunt says it is twenty years since the foundations were laid by the uncle of the present earl," said Helen; "and then for some reason or other the thing was dropped."

"Was there no house on the place before?"

"Oh! yes—not much of a house, though."

"And they pulled it down, I suppose."

"No: it stands there still."

"Where?"

"Down in the hollow there—over those trees—about the worst place they could have built in. Surely you have seen it! Poldie and I used to run all over it."

"No, I never saw it. Was it empty then?"

"Yes, or almost. I can remember some little attention paid to the garden, but none to the house. It is just falling slowly to pieces. Would you like to see it?"

"That I should," returned Bascombe, who was always ready for any new impression on his sensorium, and away they went to look at the old house of Glaston, as it was called, after some greatly older and probably fortified place.

In the hollow all the water of the park gathered to a lake before finding its way to the river Lythe. This lake was at the bottom of the old garden, and the house at the top of it. The garden was walled on the two sides, and the walls ran right down to the lake. There were wonderful legends current among the children of Glaston concerning that lake, its depth, and the creatures in it; and one terrible story, which had been made a ballad of, about a lady drowned in

a sack, whose ghost might still be seen when the moon was old, haunting the gardens and the house. Hence it came that none of them went near it, except those few whose appetites for adventure now and then grew keen enough to prevent their imaginations from rousing more fear than supplied the proper relish of danger. The house itself even those few never dared to enter.

Not so had it been with Helen and Leopold. The latter had imagination enough to receive everything offered, but Helen was the leader, and she had next to none. In her childhood she had heard the tales alluded to from her nurses, but she had been to school since, and had learned not to believe them; and certainly she was not one to be frightened at what she did not believe. So when Leopold came in the holidays, the place was one of their favoured haunts, and they knew every cubic yard in the house.

"Here," said Helen to her cousin, as she opened a door in a little closet, and showed a dusky room which had no window but a small one high up in the wall of a back staircase, "here is one room into which I never could get Poldie without the greatest trouble. I gave it up at last, he always trembled so till he got out again. I will show you such a curious place at the other end of it."

She led the way to a closet similar to that by which they had entered, and directed Bascombe how to raise a trap which filled all the floor of it so that it did not show. Under the trap was a sort of well, big enough to hold three upon emergency.

"If only they could contrive to breathe," said George. "It looks ugly. If it had but a brain and a tongue, it could tell tales."

"Come," said Helen. "I don't know how it is, but I don't like the look of it myself now. Let us get into the open air again."

Ascending from the hollow, and passing through a deep belt of trees that surrounded it, they came again to the open park, and by and by reached the road that led from the lodge to the new building, upon which they presently encountered a strange couple.

CHAPTER X.

THE DWARFS.

THE moment they had passed them, George turned to his cousin, with a countenance which bore moral indignation mingled with disgust. The healthy instincts of the elect of his race were offended by the sight of such physical failures, such mockeries of humanity as those.

The woman was little if anything over four feet in height. She was crooked, had a high shoulder, and walked like a crab, one leg being shorter than the other. Her companion walked quite straight, with a certain appearance of dignity which he neither assumed nor could have avoided, and which gave his gait the air of a march. He was not an inch taller than the woman, had broad square shoulders, pigeon breast, and invisible neck. He was twice her age, and they seemed father and daughter. They heard his breathing, loud with asthma, as they went by.

"Poor things!" said Helen, with cold kindness.

"It is shameful!" said George, in a tone of righteous anger. "Such creatures have no right to existence. The horrid manikin!"

"But, George!" said Helen, in expostulation, "the poor wretch can't help his deformity."

"No; but what right had he to marry and perpetuate such odious misery?"

"You are too hasty; the young woman is his niece."

"She ought to have been strangled the moment she was born—for the sake of humanity. Monsters ought not to live."

"Unfortunately they have all got mothers," said Helen, and something in her face made him fear he had gone too far.

"Don't mistake me, dear Helen," he said. "I would neither starve nor drown them after they had reached the faculty of resenting such treatment—of the justice of which," he added, smiling, "I am afraid it would be hard to convince them. But such people actually marry—I have known cases—and that ought to be provided against by suitable enactments and penalties."

"And so," rejoined Helen, "because they are unhappy already, you would heap unhappiness upon them?"

"Now, Helen, you must not be unfair to me any more than to your hunchbacks. It is the good of the many I seek, and surely that is better than the good of the few."

"What I object to is that it should be at the expense of the few—who are least able to bear it."

"The expense is trifling," said Bascombe. "Grant that it would be better for society that no such—or rather put it this way: grant that it would be well for each individual that goes to make up society that he were neither deformed, sickly nor idiotic, and you mean the same that I do. A given space of territory under given conditions will always maintain a certain number of human beings; therefore such a law as I propose would not mean that the number drawing the breath of heaven should, to take the instance before us in illustration, be two less, but that a certain two of them should not be as he or she who passed now, creatures whose existence is a burden to them, but such as you and I, Helen, who may say without presumption that we are no disgrace to Nature's handicraft."

Helen was not sensitive. She neither blushed nor cast down her eyes. But his tenets, thus expounded, had nothing very repulsive in them so far as she saw, and she made no further objection to them.

As they walked up the garden again, through the many lingering signs of a more stately if less luxurious existence than that of their generation, she was calmly listening to a lecture on the ground of law, namely, the resignation of certain personal rights for the securing of other and more important ones : she understood, was mildly interested, and entirely satisfied.

They seated themselves in the summer-house—a little wooden room under the down-sloping boughs of a huge cedar, and pursued their conversation—or rather Bascombe pursued his monologue. A lively girl would in all probability have been bored to death by him, but Helen was not a lively girl, and was not bored at all. Ere they went into the house she had heard, amongst a hundred other things of wisdom, his views concerning crime and punishment, with which, good and bad, true and false, I shall not trouble my reader except in regard to one point—that of the obligation to punish. Upon this point he was severe.

No person, he said, ought to allow any weakness of pity to prevent him from bringing to punishment the person who broke the laws upon which the well-being of the community depended. A man must remember that the good of the whole, and not the fate of the individual, was to be regarded.

It was altogether a notable sort of tête-à-tête between two such perfect specimens of the race, and as at length they entered the house, they professed to each other to have much enjoyed their walk.

Holding the opinions he did, Bascombe was in one thing inconsistent : he went to "divine service" on the Sunday with his aunt and cousin—not to humour Helen's prejudices but those of Mrs. Ramshorn, who, belonging, as I have said, to the profession, had strong opinions as to the wickedness of not going to church. It was of no use, he said to himself, trying to upset her ideas, for to succeed would only be to make her miserable, and his design was to make the race happy. In the grand old Abbey, therefore, they heard together morning prayers, the Litany. and the Communion, all in one, after a weariful and lazy modern custom not yet

extinct, and then a dull, sensible sermon, short, and tolerably well read, on the duty of forgiveness of injuries.

I dare say it did most of the people present a little good, undefinable as the faint influences of starlight, to sit under that "high embowed roof," within that vast artistic isolation, through whose mighty limiting the boundless is embodied, and we learn to feel the awful infinitude of the parent space out of which it is scooped. I dare also say that the tones of the mellow old organ spoke to something in many of the listeners that lay deeper far than the plummet of their self-knowledge had ever sounded. I think also that the prayers, the reading of which, in respect of intelligence, was admirable, were not only regarded as sacred utterances, but felt to be soothing influences by not a few of those who made not the slightest effort to follow them with their hearts; and I trust that on the whole their church-going tended rather to make them better than to harden them. But as to the main point, the stirring up of the children of the Highest to lay hold of the skirts of their Father's robe, the waking of the individual conscience to say *I will arise*, and the strengthening of the captive Will to break its bonds and stand free in the name of the eternal creating Freedom—for nothing of that was there any special provision. This belonged, in the nature of things, to the sermon, in which, if anywhere, the voice of the indwelling Spirit might surely be heard—out of his holy temple, if indeed that be the living soul of man, as St. Paul believed; but there was no sign that the preacher regarded his office as having any such end, although in his sermon lingered the rudimentary tokens that such must have been the original intent of pulpit-utterance.

On the way home, Bascombe made some objections to the discourse, partly to show his aunt that he had been attending. He admitted that one might forgive and forget what did not come within the scope of the law, but, as he had said to Helen before, a man was bound, he said, to punish the wrong which through him affected the community.

"George," said his aunt, "I differ from you there. Nobody ought to go to law to punish an injury. I would forgive

ever so many before I would run the risk of the law. But as to *forgetting* an injury—some injuries at least—no, that I never would !—And I don't believe, let the young man say what he will, that that is required of any one."

Helen said nothing. She had no enemies to forgive, no wrongs worth remembering, and was not interested in the question. She thought it a very good sermon indeed.

When Bascombe left for London in the morning, he carried with him the lingering rustle of silk, the odour of lavender, and a certain blueness, not of the sky, which seemed to have something behind it, as never did the sky to him. He had never met woman so worthy of being his mate, either as regarded the perfection of her form or the hidden development of her brain—evident in her capacity for the reception of truth—as his own cousin, Helen Lingard. Might not the relationship account for the fact ?

Helen thought nothing to correspond. She considered George a fine manly fellow. What bold and original ideas he had about everything ! Her brother was a baby to him ! But then Leopold was such a love of a boy! Such eyes and such a smile were not to be seen on this side the world. Helen liked her cousin, was attached to her aunt, but loved her brother Leopold, and loved nobody else. His Hindoo mother, high of caste, had given him her lustrous eyes and pearly smile, which, the first moment she saw him, won his sister's heart. He was then but eight years old, and she but eleven. Since then he had been brought up by his father's elder brother, who had the family estate in Yorkshire, but he had spent part of all his holidays with her, and they often wrote to each other. Of late indeed his letters had not been many, and a rumour had reached her that he was not doing quite satisfactorily at Cambridge, but she explained it away to the full contentment of her own heart, and went on building such castles as her poor aërolithic skill could command, with Leopold ever and always as the sharer of her self-expansion.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CURATE AT HOME.

IF we could arrive at the feelings of a fish of the northern ocean around which the waters sud denly rose to tropical temperature, and swarmed with strange forms of life, uncouth and threatening, we should have a fair symbol of the mental condition in which Thomas Wingfold now found himself. The spiritual fluid in which his being floated had become all at once more potent, and he was in consequence uncomfortable. A certain intermittent stinging, as if from the flashes of some moral electricity, had begun to pass in various directions through the crude and chaotic mass he called himself, and he felt strangely restless. It never occurred to him—as how should it ?—that he might have commenced undergoing the most marvellous of all changes, —one so marvellous, indeed, that for a man to foreknow its result or understand what he was passing through, would be more strange than that a caterpillar should recognise in the rainbow-winged butterfly hovering over the flower at whose leaf he was gnawing the perfected idea of his own potential self—I mean the change of being born again. Nor were the symptoms such as would necessarily have suggested, even to a man experienced in the natural history of the infinite, that the process had commenced.

A restless night followed his reflections in the churchyard,

and he did not wake at all comfortable. Not that ever he had been in the way of feeling comfortable. To him life had not been a land flowing with milk and honey. He had had few smiles, and not many of those grasps of the hand which let a man know another man is near him in the battle—for had it not been something of a battle, how could he have come to the age of six-and-twenty without being worse than he was? He would not have said, "All these have I kept from my youth up:" but I can say that for several of them he had shown fight, although only One knew anything of it. This morning, then, it was not merely that he did not feel comfortable: he was consciously uncomfortable. Things were getting too hot for him. That infidel fellow had poked several most awkward questions at him—yes, into him, and a good many more had in himself arisen to meet them. Usually he lay a little while before he came to himself; but this morning he came to himself at once, and not liking the interview, jumped out of bed as if he had hoped to leave himself there behind him.

He had always scorned lying, until one day, when still a boy at school, he suddenly found that he had told a lie, after which he hated it—yet now, if he was to believe—ah! whom? did not the positive fellow and his own conscience say the same thing?—his profession, his very life was a lie! the very bread he ate grew on the rank fields of falsehood! No, no; it was absurd! it could not be! What had he done to find himself damned to such a depth? Yet the thing must be looked to. He bathed himself without remorse and never even shivered, though the water in his tub was bitterly cold, dressed with more haste than precision, hurried over his breakfast, neglected his newspaper, and took down a volume of early church history. But he could not read: the thing was hopeless—utterly. With the wolves of doubt and the jackals of shame howling at his heels, how could he start for a thousand-mile race! For God's sake give him a weapon to turn and face them with! Evidence! all of it that was to be had was but such as one man received, another man refused; and the popular acceptance was worth

no more in respect of Christianity than of Mohammedanism, for how many had given the subject at all better consideration than himself? And there was Sunday with its wolves and jackals, and but a hedge between! He did not so much mind reading the prayers: he was not accountable for what was in them, although it was bad enough to stand up and read them. Happy thing he was not a dissenter, for then he would have had to pretend to pray from his own soul, which would have been too horrible! But there was the sermon! That at least was supposed to contain, or to be presented as containing, his own sentiments. Now what were his sentiments? For the life of him he could not tell. Had he *any* sentiments, any opinions, any beliefs, any unbeliefs? He had plenty of sermons, old, yellow, respectable sermons, not lithographed, neither composed by mind nor copied out by hand unknown, but in the neat writing of his old D.D. uncle, so legible that he never felt it necessary to read them over beforehand—just saw that he had the right one. A hundred and fifty-seven such sermons, the odd one for the year that began on a Sunday, of unquestionable orthodoxy, had his kind old uncle left him in his will, with the feeling probably that he was not only setting him up in sermons for life, but giving him a fair start as well in the race of which a stall in some high cathedral was the goal. For his own part he had never made a sermon, at least never one he had judged worth preaching to a congregation. He had rather a high idea, he thought, of preaching, and these sermons of his uncle he considered really excellent. Some of them, however, were altogether doctrinal, some very polemical: of such he must now beware. He would see of what kind was the next in order; he would read it and make sure it contained nothing he was not, in some degree at least, prepared to hold his face to and defend—if he could not absolutely swear he believed it purely true.

He did as resolved. The first he took up was in defence of the Athanasian creed! That would not do. He tried another. That was upon the Inspiration of the Scriptures. He glanced through it—found Moses on a level with St. Paul,

and Jonah with St. John, and doubted greatly. There might be a sense—but—! No, he would not meddle with it. He tried a third ; that was on the authority of the Church. It would not do. He had read each of all these sermons at least once to a congregation, with perfect composure and following indifference if not peace of mind, but now he could not come on one with which he was even in sympathy—not to say one of which he was certain that it was more true than false. At last he took up the odd one—that which could come into use but once in a week of years—and this was the sermon Bascombe heard and commented upon. Having read it over, and found nothing to compromise him with his conscience, which was like an irritable man trying to find his way in a windy wood by means of a broken lantern, he laid all the rest aside and felt a little relieved.

Wingfold had never neglected the private duty of a clergyman in regard of morning and evening devotions, but was in the habit of dressing and undressing his soul with the help of certain chosen contents of the prayer-book—a somewhat circuitous mode of communicating with him who was so near him,—that is, if St. Paul was right in saying that he lived and moved and was *in* Him : but that Saturday he knelt by his bedside at noon, and began to pray or try to pray as he had never prayed or tried to pray before. The perplexed man cried out within the clergyman, and pressed for some acknowledgment from God of the being he had made.

But—was it strange to tell? or if strange, was it not the most natural result nevertheless?—almost the same moment he began to pray in this truer fashion, the doubt rushed up in him like a torrent-spring from the fountains of the great deep—Was there—could there be a God at all? a real being who might actually hear his prayer? In this crowd of houses and shops and churches, amidst buying and selling and ploughing and praising and backbiting, this endless pursuit of ends and of means to ends, while yet even the wind that blew where it listed, blew under laws most fixed, and the courses of the stars were known to a hair's-breadth,—was

there—could there be a silent invisible God working his own will in it all? Was there a driver to that chariot whose multitudinous horses seemed tearing away from the pole in all directions? and was he indeed, although invisible and inaudible, guiding that chariot, sure as the flight of a comet, straight to its goal? Or was there a soul to that machine whose myriad wheels went grinding on and on, grinding the stars into dust, matter into man, and man into nothingness? Was there—could there be a living heart to the universe that did positively hear him—poor, misplaced, dishonest, ignorant Thomas Wingfold, who had presumed to undertake a work he neither could perform nor had the courage to forsake, when out of the misery of the grimy little cellar of his consciousness he cried aloud for light and something to make a man of him? For now that Thomas had begun to doubt like an honest being, every ugly thing within him began to show itself to his awakened probity.

But honest and of good parentage as the doubts were, no sooner had they shown themselves, than the wings of the ascending prayers fluttered feebly and failed. They sank slowly, fell, and lay as dead, while all the wretchedness of his position rushed back upon him with redoubled inroad. Here was a man who could not pray, and yet must go and read prayers and preach in the old attesting church, as if he too were of those who knew something of the secrets of the Almighty, and could bring out from his treasury, if not things new and surprising, then things old and precious! Ought he not to send round the bell-man to cry aloud that there would be no service? But what right had he to lay his troubles, the burden of his dishonesty, upon the shoulders of them who faithfully believed, and who looked to him to break to them their daily bread? And would not any attempt at a statement of the reasons he had for such an outrageous breach of all decorum be taken for a denial of those things concerning which he only desired most earnestly to know that they were true? For he had received from somewhere, he knew not how or whence, a genuine prejudice in favour of Christianity, while of those refractions and

distorted reflexes of it which go by its name and rightly disgust many, he had had few of the tenets thrust upon his acceptance.

Thus into the dark pool of his dull submissive life, the bold words of the unbeliever had fallen—a dead stone perhaps, but causing a thousand motions in the living water. Question crowded upon question, and doubt upon doubt, until he could bear it no longer, and starting from the floor on which at last he had sunk prostrate, rushed in all but involuntary haste from the house, and scarcely knew where he was until, in a sort, he came to himself some little distance from the town, wandering hurriedly in field-paths.

CHAPTER XII.

AN INCIDENT.

IT was a fair morning of All Hallow's summer. The trees were nearly despoiled, but the grass was green, and there was a memory of spring in the low sad sunshine: even the sunshine, the gladdest thing in creation, is sad sometimes. There was no wind, nothing to fight with, nothing to turn his mind from its own miserable perplexities. How endlessly his position as a clergyman, he thought, added to his miseries! Had he been a man unpledged, he could have taken his own time to think out the truths of his relations; as it was, he felt like a man in a coffin: out he must get, but had not room to make a single vigorous effort for freedom! It did not occur to him yet, that, unpressed from without, his honesty unstung, he might have taken more time to find out where he was than would have been either honest or healthful.

He came to a stile where his path joined another that ran both ways, and there seated himself, just as the same strange couple I have already described as met by Miss Lingard and Mr. Bascombe approached and went by. After they had gone a good way, he caught sight of something lying in the path, and going to pick it up, found it was a small manuscript volume.

With the pleasurable instinct of service, he hastened after

them. They heard him, and turning waited for his approach. He took off his hat, and presenting the book to the young woman, asked if she had dropped it. Possibly had they been ordinary people of the class to which they seemed to belong, he would not have uncovered to them, for he naturally shrunk from what might be looked upon as a display of courtesy, but their deformity rendered it imperative. Her face flushed so at sight of the book that, in order to spare her uneasiness, Wingfold could not help saying with a smile,

"Do not be alarmed: I have not read one word of it."

She returned his smile with much sweetness, and said,

"I see I need not have been afraid."

Her companion joined in thanks and apologies for having caused him so much trouble. Wingfold assured them it had been but a pleasure. It was far from a scrutinising look with which he regarded them, but the interview left him with the feeling that their faces were refined and intelligent, and their speech was good. Again he lifted his rather shabby hat, the man responded with equal politeness in removing from a great gray head one rather better, and they turned from each other and went their ways, the sight of their malformation arousing in the curate no such questions as those with which it had agitated the tongue if not the heart of George Bascombe, to widen the scope of his perplexities. He had heard the loud breathing of the man and seen the projecting eyes of the woman, but he never said to himself therefore that they were more hardly dealt with than he. Had such a thought occurred to him, he would have comforted the pain of his sympathy with the reflection that at least neither of them was a curate of the Church of England who knew positively nothing of the foundation upon which that church professed to stand.

How he got through the Sunday he never could have told. What times a man may get through—he knows not how! As soon as it was over, it was all a mist—from which gleamed or gloomed large the face of George Bascombe with its keen unbelieving eyes and scornful lips. All the

time he was reading the prayers and lessons, all the time he was reading his uncle's sermon, he had not only been aware of those eyes, but aware also of what lay behind them—seeing and reading the reflex of himself in Bascombe's brain; but nothing more whatever could he recall.

Like finger-posts dim-seen, on a moorland journey, through the gathering fogs, Sunday after Sunday passed. I will not request my reader to accompany me across the confusions upon which was blowing that wind whose breath was causing a world to pass from chaos to cosmos. One who has ever gone through any experience of the kind himself will be able to imagine it; to one who has not, my descriptions would be of small service: he would but shrink from the representation as diseased and of no general interest. And he would be so far right, that the interest in such things must be most particular and individual or not at all.

The weeks passed and seemed to bring him no light, only increased earnestness in the search after it. Some assurance he must find soon, else he would resign his curacy, and look out for a situation as tutor.

Of course all this he ought to have gone through long ago! But how can a man go through anything till his hour be come? Saul of Tarsus was sitting at the feet of Gamaliel when our Lord said to his apostles, "Yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." Wingfold had all this time been skirting the wall of the kingdom of heaven without even knowing that there was a wall there, not to say seeing a gate in it. The fault lay with those who had brought him up to the church as to the profession of medicine, or the bar, or the drapery business—as if it lay on one level of choice with other human callings. Nor were the honoured of the church who had taught him free from blame, who never warned him to put his shoes from off his feet for the holiness of the ground. But how were they to warn him, if they had sowed and reaped and gathered into barns on that ground, and had never discovered therein treasure more holy than libraries, incomes,

and the visits of royalty? As to visions of truth that make a man sigh with joy, and enlarge his heart with more than human tenderness—how many of those men had ever found such treasures in the fields of the church? How many of them knew save by hearsay whether there be any Holy Ghost! How then were they to warn other men from the dangers of following in their footsteps and becoming such as they? Where, in a general ignorance and community of fault, shall we begin to blame? Wingfold had no time to accuse any one after the first gush of bitterness. He had to awake from the dead and cry for light, and was soon in the bitter agony of the cataleptic struggle between life and death.

He thought afterwards, when the time had passed, that surely in this period of darkness he had been visited and upheld by a power whose presence and even influence escaped his consciousness. He knew not how else he could have got through it. Also he remembered that strange helps had come to him; that the aspects of nature then wonderfully softened towards him, that then first he began to feel sympathy with her ways and shows, and to see in them all the working of a diffused humanity. He remembered how once a hawthorn-bud set him weeping; and how once, as he went miserable to church, a child looked up in his face and smiled, and how in the strength of that smile he had walked boldly to the lectern.

He never knew how long he had been in the strange birth-agony, in which the soul is as it were at once the mother that bears and the child that is born.

CHAPTER XIII.

A REPORT OF PROGRESS.

IN the meantime George Bascombe came and went; every visit he showed clearer notions as to what he was for and what he was against; every visit he found Helen more worthy and desirable than theretofore, and flattered himself he made progress in the conveyance of his opinions and judgments over into her mind. His various accomplishments went far in aid of his design. There was hardly anything Helen could do that George could not do as well, and some he could do better, while there were many things George was at home in which were sealed to her. The satisfaction of teaching such a pupil he found great. When at length he began to make love to her, Helen found it rather agreeable than otherwise, and if there was a little more *making* in it than some women would have liked, Helen was not sufficiently in love with him to detect its presence. Still the pleasure of his preference was such that it opened her mind with a favourable prejudice towards whatever in the shape of theory or doctrine he would have her receive; and much that a more experienced mind would have rejected because of its evident results in practice, was by her accepted in the ignorance which confined her regard of his propositions to their intellectual relations, and prevented her from following them into their influences upon life, which would have

reflected light upon their character. For life in its real sense was to her as yet little more definite and present than a dream that waits for the coming night. Hence when her cousin at length ventured to attack even those doctrines which all women who have received a Christian education would naturally be expected to revere the most, she was able to listen to him unshocked. But she little thought, or he either, that it was only in virtue of what Christian teaching she had had that she was capable of appreciating what was grand in his doctrine of living for posterity without a hope of good result to self beyond the consciousness that future generations of perishing men and women would be a little more comfortable, and perhaps a little less faulty therefrom. She did not reflect either that no one's theory concerning death is of much weight in his youth while life *feels* interminable, or that the gift of comfort during a life of so little value that the giver can part with it without regret is scarcely one to be looked upon as a mighty benefaction.

"But truth is truth," George would have replied.

What you profess to teach them might be a fact, but could never be a truth, I answer. And the very value which you falsely put upon facts you have learned to attribute to them from the supposed existence of something at the root of all facts, namely *truths*, or eternal laws of being. Still, if you believe that men will be happier from learning your discovery that there is no God, preach it, and prosper in proportion to its truth. No; that from my pen would be a curse—no, preach it not, I say, until you have searched all spaces of space, up and down, in greatness and smallness—where I grant indeed, but you cannot know, that you will not find him—and all regions of thought and feeling, all the unknown mental universe of possible discovery—preach it not until you have searched that also, I say, lest what you count a truth should prove to be no fact, and there should after all be somewhere, somehow, a very, living God, a Truth indeed, in whom is the universe. If you say, "But I am convinced there is none," I answer—You may be convinced that there

is no God such as this or that in whom men imagine they believe, but you cannot be convinced there is no God.

Meantime George did not forget the present of this life in its future, continued particular about his cigars and his wine, ate his dinners with what some would call a good conscience and I would call a dull one, were I sure it was not a good digestion they really meant, and kept reading hard and to purpose.

Matters as between the two made no rapid advance. George went on loving Helen more than any other woman, and Helen went on liking George next best to her brother Leopold. Whether it came of prudence, of which George possessed not a little, of coldness of temperament, or a pride that would first be sure of acceptance, I do not know, but he made no formal offer yet of handing himself over to Helen, and certainly Helen was in no haste to hear, more than he to utter, the irrevocable.

CHAPTER XIV.

JEREMY TAYLOR.

ONE Tuesday morning in the spring, the curate received by the local post the following letter dated from The Park-Gate :

"Respected Sir : An obligation on my part which you have no doubt forgotten gives me courage to address you on a matter which seems to me of no small consequence concerning yourself. You do not know me, and the name at the end of my letter will have for you not a single association. The matter itself must be its own excuse.

"I sat in a free seat at the Abbey church last Sunday morning. I had not listened long to the sermon ere I began to fancy I foresaw what was coming, and in a few minutes more I seemed to recognise it as one of Jeremy Taylor's. When I came home I found that the best portions of one of his sermons had, in the one you read, been wrought up with other material.

"If, sir, I imagined you to be one of such as would willingly have that regarded as their own which was better than they could produce, and would with contentment receive any resulting congratulations, I should feel that I was only doing you a wrong if I gave you a hint which might aid you in avoiding detection ; for the sooner the truth concerning such a one was known, and the judgment of society brought

to bear upon it, the better for him, whether the result were justification or the contrary. But I have read that in your countenance and demeanour which convinces me that, however custom and the presence of worldly elements in the community to which you belong may have influenced your judgment, you require only to be set thinking of a matter, to follow your conscience with regard to whatever you may find involved in it.—I have the honour to be, respected sir, your obedient servant and well-wisher, Joseph Polwarth."

Wingfold sat staring at the letter, slightly stunned. The feeling which first grew recognisable in the chaos it had caused was vexation at having so committed himself; the next, annoyance with his dead old uncle for having led him into such a scrape. There in the good doctor's own handwriting lay the sermon, looking nowise different from the rest! Had he forgotten his marks of quotation? Or to that sermon did he always have a few words of extempore introduction? For himself he was as ignorant of Jeremy Taylor as of Zoroaster. It could not be that that was his uncle's mode of making his sermons? Was it possible they could all be pieces of literary mosaic? It was very annoying. If the fact came to be known, it would certainly be said that he had attempted to pass off Jeremy Taylor's for his own—as if he would have the impudence to make the attempt, and with such a well-known writer! But what difference did it make whether the writer was well or ill known? None except as to the relative probabilities of escape and discovery! And should the accusation be brought against him, how was he to answer it? By burdening the reputation of his departed uncle with the odium of the fault? Was it worse in his uncle to use Jeremy Taylor than in himself to use his uncle? Or would his remonstrants accept the translocation of blame? Would the church-going or chapel-going inhabitants of Glaston remain mute when it came to be discovered that since his appointment he had not once preached a sermon of his own? How was it that knowing all about it in the background of his mind, he had never come to think of it before? It was true that, admirer of his uncle as he was, he

had never imagined himself reaping any laurels from the credit of his sermons ; it was equally true, however, that he had not told a single person of the hidden cistern whence he drew his large discourse. But what could it matter to any man, so long as a good sermon was preached, where it came from? He did not occupy the pulpit in virtue of his personality, but of his office, and it was not a place for the display of originality, but for dispensing the bread of life. From the stores of other people? Yes, certainly—if other people's bread was better, and no one the worse for his taking it. "For me, I have none," he said to himself. Why then should that letter have made him uncomfortable? What had he to be ashamed of? Why should he object to being found out? What did he want to conceal? Did not everybody know that very few clergymen really made their own sermons? Was it not absurd, this mute agreement that, although all men knew to the contrary, it must appear to be taken for granted that a man's sermons were of his own mental production? Still more absurd as well as cruel was the way in which they sacrificed to the known falsehood by the contempt they poured upon any fellow the moment they were able to say of productions which never could have been his, that they were by this man or that man, or bought at this shop or that shop in Great Queen Street or Booksellers' Row. After that he was an enduring object for the pointed finger of a mild scorn. It was nothing but the old Spartan game of steal as you will and enjoy as you can : you are nothing the worse ; but woe to you if you are caught in the act ! There *was* something contemptible about the whole thing. He was a greater humbug than he had believed himself, for upon this humbug which he now found himself despising he had himself been acting diligently ! It dawned upon him that, while there was nothing wrong in preaching his uncle's sermons, there was evil in yielding to cast any veil, even the most transparent, over the fact that the sermons were not his own.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PARK GATE.

HE had, however, one considerate, even friendly, parishioner, it seemed, whom it became him at least to thank for his openness. He ceased to pace the room, sat down at his writing-table, and acknowledged Mr. Polwarth's letter, expressing his obligation for its contents, and saying that he would do himself the honour of calling upon him that afternoon, in the hope of being allowed to say for himself what little could be said, and of receiving counsel in regard to the difficulty wherein he found himself. He sent the note by his landlady's boy, and as soon as he had finished his lunch, which meant his dinner, for he could no longer afford to dull his soul in its best time for reading and thinking, he set out to find Park Gate, which he took for some row of dwellings in the suburbs.

Going in the direction pointed out, and finding he had left all the houses behind him, he stopped at the gate of Osterfield Park to make further inquiry. The door of the lodge was opened by one whom he took, for the first half-second, to be a child, but recognised, the next, as the same young woman whose book he had picked up in the fields a few months before. He had never seen her since, but her deformity and her face together had made it easy to remember her.

"We have met before," he said, in answer to her courtesy and smile, "and you must now do me a small favour if you can."

"I shall be most happy, sir. Please come in," she answered.

"I am sorry I cannot at this moment, as I have an engagement. Can you tell me where Mr. Polwarth of the Park Gate lives?"

The girl's smile of sweetness changed to one of amusement as she repeated, in a gentle voice through which ran a thread of suffering,

"Come in, sir, please. My uncle's name is Joseph Polwarth, and this is the gate to Osterfield Park. People know it as the Park Gate."

The house was not one of those trim modern park-lodges, all angles and peaks, which one sees everywhere now-a-days, but a low cottage, with a very thick, wiglike thatch, into which rose two astonished eyebrows over the stare of two half-awake dormer-windows. On the front of it were young leaves and old hips enough to show that in summer it must be covered with roses.

Wingfold entered at once, and followed her through the kitchen upon which the door immediately opened, a bright place, with stone floor, and shining things on the walls, to a neat little parlour, cosy and rather dark, with a small window to the garden behind, and a smell of last year's roses.

"My uncle will be here in a few minutes," she said, placing a chair for him. "I would have had a fire here, but my uncle always talks better amongst his books. He expected you, but my lord's steward sent for him up to the new house."

He took the chair she offered him, and sat down to wait. He had not much of the gift of making talk—a questionable accomplishment,—and he never could approach his so-called inferiors but as his equals, the fact being that in their presence he never felt any difference. Notwithstanding his ignorance of the lore of Christianity, Thomas Wingfold

was, in regard to some things, gifted with what I am tempted to call a divine stupidity. Many of the distinctions and privileges after which men follow, and of the annoyances and slights over which they fume, were to the curate inappreciable; he did not and could not see them.

"So you are warders of the gate here, Miss Polwarth?" he said, assuming that to be her name, and rightly, when the young woman, who had for a moment left the room, returned.

"Yes," she answered, "we have kept it now for about eight years, sir. It is no hard task. But I fancy there will be a little more to do when the house is finished."

"It is a long way for you to go to church."

"It would be, sir; but I do not go."

"Your uncle does?"

"Not very often, sir."

She left the door open and kept coming and going between the kitchen and the parlour, busy about house affairs. Wingfold sat and watched her as he had opportunity with growing interest.

She had the full-sized head that is so often set on a small body, and it looked yet larger from the quantity of rich brown hair upon it—hair which some ladies would have given their income to possess. Clearly too it gave pleasure to its owner, for it was becomingly as well as carefully and modestly dressed. Her face seemed to Wingfold more interesting every fresh peep he had of it, until at last he pronounced it to himself one of the sweetest he had ever seen. Its prevailing expression was of placidity, and something that was not contentment merely: I would term it satisfaction, were I sure that my reader would call up the very antipode of *self*-satisfaction. And yet there were lines of past and shadows of present suffering upon it. The only sign, however, that her poor crooked body was not at present totally forgotten was a slight shy undulation that now and then flickered along the lines of her sensitive mouth, seeming to indicate a shadowy dim-defined thought, or rather feeling, of apology, as if she would disarm pre-

judice by an expression of sorrow that she could not help the pain and annoyance her unsightliness must occasion. Every feature in her thin face was good, and seemed, individually almost, to speak of a loving spirit, yet he could see ground for suspecting that keen expressions of a quick temper could be no strangers upon those delicately-modelled forms. Her hands and feet were both as to size and shape those of a mere child.

He was still studying her like a book which a boy reads by stealth, when with slow step her uncle entered the room.

Wingfold rose and held out his hand.

"You are welcome, sir," said Polwarth modestly, with the strong grasp of a small firm hand. "Will you walk upstairs with me where we shall be undisturbed? My niece has, I hope, already made my apologies for not being at home to receive you.—Rachel, my child, will you get us a cup of tea, and by the time it is ready we shall have got through our business, I dare say."

The face of Wingfold's host and new friend in expression a good deal resembled that of his niece, but bore traces of yet greater suffering—bodily, and it might be mental as well. It did not look quite old enough for the whiteness of the plentiful hair that crowned it, and yet there was that in it which might account for the whiteness.

His voice was a little dry and husky, streaked as it were with the asthma whose sounds made that big disproportioned chest seem like the cave of the east wind; but it had a tone of dignity and decision in it quite in harmony with both matter and style of his letter, and before Wingfold had followed him to the top of the steep narrow strait staircase all sense of incongruity in him had vanished from his mind.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ATTIC.

THE little man led the way into a tolerably large room, with down-sloping ceiling on both sides, lighted by a small window in the gable, near the fireplace, and a dormer window as well. The low walls, up to the slope, were filled with books ; books lay on the table, on the bed, on chairs, and in corners everywhere.

"Aha!" said Wingfold, as he entered and cast his eyes around, "there is no room for surprise that you should have found me out so easily, Mr. Polwarth! Here you have a legion of detectives for such rascals."

The little man turned, and for a moment looked at him with a doubtful and somewhat pained expression, as if he had not been prepared for such an entrance on a solemn question ; but a moment's reading of the curate's honest face, which by this time had a good deal more print upon it than would have been found there six months agone, sufficed ; the cloud melted into a smile, and he said cordially,

"It is very kind of you, sir, to take my presumption in such good part. Pray sit down, sir. You will find that chair a comfortable one."

"Presumption!" echoed Wingfold. "The presumption was all on my part, and the kindness on yours. But you must first hear my explanation, such as it is. It makes the

matter hardly a jot the better, only a man would not willingly look worse, or better either, than he is, and besides, we must understand each other if we would be friends. However unlikely it may seem to you, Mr. Polwarth, I really do share the common weakness of wanting to be taken exactly for what I am, neither more nor less."

"It is a noble weakness, and far enough from common, I am sorry to think," returned Polwarth.

The curate then told the gate-keeper of his uncle's legacy, and his own ignorance of Jeremy Taylor.

"But," he concluded, "since you set me thinking about it, my judgment has capsized itself, and it now seems to me worse to use my uncle's sermons than to have used the bishop's, which any one might discover to be what they are."

"I see no harm in either," said Polwarth, "provided only it be above board. I believe some clergymen think the only evil lies in detection. I doubt if they ever escape it, and believe the amount of successful deception in that kind to be very small indeed. Many in a congregation can tell, by a kind of instinct, whether a man be preaching his own sermons or not. But the worst evil appears to me to lie in the tacit understanding that a sermon must *seem* to be a man's own, although all in the congregation know, and the would-be-preacher knows that they know, that it is none of his."

"Then you mean, Mr. Polwarth, that I should solemnly acquaint my congregation next Sunday with the fact that the sermon I am about to read to them is one of many left me by my worthy uncle, Jonah Driftwood, D.D., who on his deathbed expressed the hope that I should support their teaching by my example, for, having gone over them some ten or fifteen times in the course of his incumbency, and bettered each every time until he could do no more for it, he did not think, save by my example, I could carry further the enforcement of the truths they contained: shall I tell them all that?"

Polwarth laughed, but with a certain seriousness in his merriment, which, however, took nothing from its genuineness, indeed seemed rather to add thereto.

"It would hardly be needful to enter so fully into particulars," he said. "It would be enough to let them know that you wished it understood between them and you that you did not profess to teach them anything of yourself, but merely to bring to bear upon them the teaching of others. It would raise complaints and objections, doubtless; but for that you must be prepared if you would do anything right."

Wingfold was silent, thoughtful, saying to himself, "How straight an honest bow can shoot!—But this involves something awful. To stand up in that pulpit and speak about myself! I who, even if I had any opinions, could never see reasons for presenting them to other people! It's my office, is it—not me? Then I wish my office would write his own sermons. He can read the prayers well enough!"

All his life, a little heave of pent-up humour would now and then shake his burden into a more comfortable position upon his bending shoulders. He gave a forlorn laugh.

"But," resumed the small man, "have you never preached a sermon of your own thinking—I don't mean of your own making—one that came out of the commentaries, which are, I am told, the mines whither some of our most noted preachers go to dig for their first inspirations—but one that came out of your own heart—your delight in something you had found out, or something you felt much?"

"No," answered Wingfold; "I have nothing, never had anything worth giving to another; and it would seem to me very unreasonable to subject a helpless congregation to the blundering attempts of such a fellow to put into the forms of reasonable speech things he really knows nothing about."

"You must know about some things which it might do them good to be reminded of—even if they know them already," said Polwarth. "I cannot imagine that a man who looks things in the face as you do the moment they confront you, has not lived at all, has never met with anything in his history which has taught him something other people need to be taught. I profess myself a believer in preaching, and consider that in so far as the Church of England has

ceased to be a preaching church—and I don't call nine-tenths of what goes by the name of it *preaching*—she has forgotten a mighty part of her high calling. Of course a man to whom no message has been personally given has no right to take the place of a prophet, and cannot, save by more or less of simulation ; but there is room for teachers as well as prophets, and the more need of teachers that the prophets are so few ; and a man may right honestly be a clergyman who teaches the people, though he may possess none of the gifts of prophecy."

"I do not now see well how you are leading me," said Wingfold, cousiderably astonished at both the aptness and fluency with which a man in his host's position was able to express himself. "Pray, what do you mean by *prophecy?*"

"I mean what I take to be the sense in which St. Paul uses the word—I mean the highest kind of preaching. But I will come to the point practically : a man, I say, who does not feel in his soul that he has something to tell his people should straightway turn his energy to the providing of such food for them as he finds feeds himself. In other words, if he has nothing new in his own treasure, let him bring something old out of another man's. If his soul is unfed, he can hardly be expected to find food for other people, and has no business in any pulpit, but ought to betake himself to some other employment—whatever he may have been predestined to—I mean, made fit for."

"Then do you intend that a man *should* make up his sermons from the books he reads?"

"Yes, if he cannot do better. But then I would have him read—not with his sermon in his eye, but with his people in his heart. Men in business and professions have so little time for reading or thinking—and idle people have still less—that their means of grace, as the theologians say, are confined to discipline without nourishment, whence their religion, if they have any, is often from mere atrophy but a skeleton ; and the office of preaching is, first of all, to wake them up lest their sleep turn to death ; next, to make them hungry, and lastly to supply that hunger ; and for all

these things the pastor has to take thought. If he feed not the flock of God, then is he an hireling, and no shepherd."

At this moment Rachel entered with a small tea-tray · she could carry only little things, and a few at a time. She cast a glance of almost loving solicitude at the young man who now sat before her uncle with head bowed and self-abasement on his honest countenance, then a look of almost expostulation at her uncle, as if interceding for a culprit, and begging the master not to be too hard upon him. But the little man smiled—such a sweet smile of reassurance that her face returned at once to its prevailing expression of content. She cleared a place on the table, set down her tray, and went to bring cups and saucers.

CHAPTER XVII.

POLWARTH'S PLAN.

"I THINK I understand you now," said Wingfold, after the little pause occasioned by the young woman's entrance: "You would have a man who cannot be original, deal honestly in second-hand goods. Or perhaps, rather, he should say to the congregation, 'This is not home-made bread I offer you, but something better. I got it from this or that baker's shop. I have eaten of it myself, and it has agreed well with me and done me good. If you chew it well, I don't doubt you also will find it good.'—Is that something like what you would have, Mr. Polwarth?"

"Precisely," answered the gate-keeper. "But," he added, after a moment's delay, "I should be sorry if you stopped there."

"Stopped there!" echoed Wingfold. "The question is whether I can begin there. You have no idea how ignorant I am—how little I have read!"

"I have some idea of both, I fancy. I must have known considerably less than you at your age, for I was never at a university."

"But perhaps even then you had more of the knowledge which, they say, life only can give."

"I have it now, at all events. But of that every one has enough who lives his life. Those who gain no experience

are those who shirk the king's highway for fear of encountering the Duty seated by the roadside."

"You ought to be a clergyman yourself, sir," said Wingfold, humbly. "How is it that such as I—"

Here he checked himself, knowing something of how it was.

"I hope I ought to be just what I am, neither more nor less," replied Polwarth. "As to being a clergyman, Moses had a better idea about such things, at least so far as concerns outsides, than you seem to have, Mr. Wingfold. He would never have let a man who in size and shape is a mere mockery of the human stand up to minister to the congregation. But if you will let me help you, I shall be most grateful; for of late I have been oppressed with the thought that I serve no one but myself and my niece. I am in mortal fear of growing selfish under the weight of my privileges."

A fit of asthmatic coughing seized him, and grew in severity until he seemed struggling for his life. It was at the worst when his niece entered, but she showed no alarm, only concern, and did nothing but go up to him and lay her hand on his back between his shoulders till the fit was over. The instant the convulsion ceased, its pain dissolved in a smile.

Wingfold uttered some lame expressions of regret that he should suffer so much.

"It is really nothing to distress you, or me either, Mr. Wingfold," said the little man. "Shall we have a cup of tea, and then resume our talk?"

"The fact, I find, Mr. Polwarth," said the curate, giving the result of what had been passing through his mind, and too absorbed in that to reply to the invitation, "is that I must not, and indeed cannot, give you half-confidences. I will tell you all that troubles me, for it is plain that you know something of which I am ignorant—something which, I have great hopes, will turn out to be the very thing I need to know. May I speak? Will you let me talk about myself?"

"I am entirely at your service, Mr. Wingfold," returned

Polwarth; and seeing the curate did not touch his tea, placed his own cup again on the table.

The young woman got down like a child from the chair upon which she had perched herself at the table, and, with a kind look at Wingfold, was about to leave the room.

"No, no, Miss Polwarth!" said the curate, rising; "I shall not be able to go on if I feel that I have sent you away —and your tea untouched too! What a selfish and ungrateful fellow I am! I did not even observe that you had given me tea! But you would pardon me if you knew what I have been going through. If you don't mind staying, we can talk and drink our tea at the same time. I am very fond of tea when it is so good as I see yours is. I only fear I may have to say some things that will shock you."

"I will stay till then," replied Rachel, with a smile, and climbed again upon her chair. "I am not much afraid. My uncle says things sometimes fit to make a Pharisee's hair stand on his head, but somehow they make my heart burn inside me.—May I stop, uncle? I should like so much!"

"Certainly, my child, if Mr. Wingfold will not feel your presence a restraint."

"Not in the least," said the curate.

Miss Polwarth helped them to bread and butter, and a brief silence followed.

"I was brought up to the church," said Wingfold at length, playing with his teaspoon, and looking down on the table. "It's an awful shame such a thing should have been, but I don't find out that anybody in particular was to blame for it. Things are all wrong that way, in general, I doubt. I pass my examinations with decency, distinguish myself in nothing, go before the bishop, am admitted a deacon, after a year am ordained a priest, and after another year or two of false preaching and of parish work, suddenly find myself curate in charge of a grand old abbey church; but as to what the whole thing means in practical relation with myself as a human being, I am as ignorant as Simon Magus, without his excuse. Do not mistake me. I think I could stand

an examination on the doctrines of the church as contained in the articles and prayer-book generally. But for all they have done for me I might as well have never heard of them."

"Don't be quite sure of that, Mr. Wingfold. At least they have brought you to inquire if there be anything in them."

"Mr. Polwarth," returned Wingfold abruply, "I cannot even prove there is a God!"

"But the Church of England exists for the sake of teaching Christianity, not proving that there is a God."

"What is Christianity, then?"

"God in Christ, and Christ in man."

"What is the use of that if there be no God?"

"None whatever."

"Mr. Polwarth, can you prove there is a God?"

"No."

"Then if you don't believe there is a God—I don't know what is to become of me," said the curate, in a tone of deep disappointment, and rose to go.

"Mr. Wingfold," said the little man, with a smile and a deep breath as of delight at the thought that was moving him, "I know him in my heart, and he is all in all to me. You did not ask whether I believed in him, but whether I could prove that there was a God. As well ask a fly which has not yet crawled about the world if he can prove that it is round!"

"Pardon me, and have patience with me," said Wingfold, resuming his seat. "I am a fool. But it is life or death to me."

"I would we were all such fools! But please ask me no more questions; or ask me as many as you will, but expect no answers just yet. I want to know more of your mind first."

"Well, I will ask questions, but press for no answers. If you cannot prove there is a God, do you know for certain that such a one as Jesus Christ ever lived? Can it be proved with positive certainty? I say nothing of what they call the doctrines of Christianity, or the authority of the church,

or the sacraments, or anything of that sort. Such questions are at present of no interest to me. And yet the fact that they do not interest me were enough to prove me in as false and despicable a position as ever man found himself occupying—as arrant a hypocrite and deceiver as any god-personating priest in the Delphic temple. I had rather a man despised than excused me, Mr. Polwarth, for I am at issue with myself, and love not my past."

"I shall do neither, Mr. Wingfold. Go on, if you please, sir. I am more deeply interested than I can tell you."

"Some few months ago, then, I met a young man who takes for granted the opposite of all that I had up to that time taken for granted, and which now I want to be able to prove. He spoke with contempt of my profession. I could not defend my profession, and of course had to despise myself. I began to think. I began to pray—if you will excuse me for mentioning it. My whole past life appeared like the figures that glide over the field of a *camera-obscura*—not an abiding fact in it all. A cloud gathered about me, and hangs about me still. I call, but no voice answers me out of the darkness, and at times I am in despair. I would, for the love and peace of honesty, give up the profession, but I shrink from forsaking what I may yet possibly find—though I fear, I fear—to be as true as I wish to find it. Something, I know not what, holds me to it—some dim vague affection, possibly mere prejudice, aided by a love for music and the other sweet sounds of our prayers and responses. Nor would I willingly be supposed to deny what I dare not say—indeed know not how to say I believe, not knowing what it is. I should nevertheless have abandoned everything months ago, had I not felt bound by my agreement to serve my rectory for a year. You are the only one of the congregation who has shown me any humanity, and I beg of you to be my friend and help me. What shall I do? After the avowal you have made, I may well ask you again, How am I to know that there is a God?"

"It were a more pertinent question, sir," returned Polwarth,—"If there be a God, how am I to find him? And,

as I hinted before, there is another question—one you have already put—more pertinent to your position as an English clergyman: Was there ever such a man as Jesus Christ?—Those, I think, were your own words; what do you mean by *such* a man?"

"Such as he is represented in the New Testament."

"From that representation, what description would you give of him now? What is that *such?* What sort of person, supposing the story true, would you take this Jesus from that story to have been?"

Wingfold thought for a while.

"I am a worse humbug than I fancied," he said. "I cannot tell what he was. My thoughts of him are so vague and indistinct that it would take me a long time to render myself able to answer your question."

"Perhaps longer still than you think, sir. It took me a very long time."

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOSEPH POLWARTH.

"SHALL I tell you," the gate-keeper went on, "something of my life, in return of the confidence you have honoured me with?"

"Nothing could be more to my mind," answered Wingfold. "And I trust," he added, "it is no unworthy curiosity that makes me anxious to understand how you have come to know so much."

"Indeed, it is not that I know much," said the little man. "On the contrary, I am the most ignorant person of my acquaintance. You would be astonished to discover what I don't know. But the thing is that I know what is worth knowing. Yet I get not a crumb more than my daily bread by it—I mean the bread by which the inner man lives. The man who gives himself to making money will seldom fail of becoming a rich man; and it would be hard if a man who gave himself to find wherewithal to still the deepest cravings of his best self should not be able to find that bread of life. I tried to make a little money by bookselling once: I failed—not to pay my debts, but to make the money; I could not go into it heartily, or give it thought enough, so it was all right I should not succeed; but what I did and do make my object does not disappoint me.

"My ancestors, as my name indicates, were of and in Cornwall, where they held large property. Forgive the seem-

ing boast—it is but fact, and can reflect little enough on one like me. Scorn and pain mingled with mighty hope is a grand prescription for weaning the heart from the judgments and aspirations of this world. Later ancestors were, not many generations ago, the proprietors of this very property of Osterfield, which the uncle of the present Lord de Barré bought, and to which I, their descendant, am gate-keeper. What with gambling, drinking, and worse, they deserved to lose it. The results of their lawlessness are ours: we are what and where you see us. With the inherited poison, the Father gave the antidote. Rachel, my child, am I not right when I say that you thank God with me for having *thus* visited the iniquities of the fathers upon the children?"

"I do, uncle; you know I do—from the bottom of my heart," replied Rachel in a low tender voice.

A great solemnity came upon the spirit of Wingfold, and for a moment he felt as if he sat wrapt in a cloud of sacred marvel, beyond and around which lay a gulf of music too perfect to touch his sense. But presently Polwarth resumed:

"My father was in appearance a remarkably fine man, tall and stately. Of him I have little to say. If he did not do well, my grandfather must be censured first. He had a sister very like Rachel here. Poor aunt Lottie! She was not so happy as my little one. My brothers were all fine men like himself, yet they all died young except my brother Robert. He too is dead now, thank God, and I trust he is in peace. I had almost begun to fear with himself that he would never die. And yet he was but fifty. He left me my Rachel with her twenty pounds a year. I have thirty of my own, and this cottage we have rent-free for attending to the gate. I shall tell you more about my brother some day. There are none of the family left now but myself and Rachel. God in his mercy is about to let it cease.

"I was sent to one of our smaller public schools—mainly, I believe, because I was an eyesore to my handsome father. There I made, I fancy, about as good a beginning as wretched health and the miseries of a sensitive nature, ever

conscious of exposure, without mother or home to hide its feebleness and deformity, would permit. For then first I felt myself an outcast. I was the butt of all the coarser-minded of my school-fellows, and the kindness of some could but partially make up for it. On the other hand, I had no haunting and irritating sense of wrong, such as I believe not a few of my fellows in deformity feel—no burning indignation, or fierce impulse to retaliate on those who injured me or on the society that scorned me. The isolation that belonged to my condition wrought indeed to the intensifying of my individuality, but that again intensified my consciousness of need more than wrong, until the passion blossomed almost into assurance, and at length I sought even with agony the aid to which my wretchedness seemed to have a right. My longing was mainly for a refuge, for some corner into which I might creep, where I should be concealed, and so at rest. The sole triumph I coveted over my persecutors was to know that they could not find me—that I had a friend stronger than they. It is no wonder I should not remember when I began to pray, and hope that God heard me. I used to fancy to myself that I lay in his hand and peeped through his fingers at my foes. That was at night, for my deformity brought me one blessed comfort—that I had no bed-fellow. This I felt at first as both a sad deprivation and a painful rejection, but I learned to pray the sooner for the loneliness, and the heartier from the solitude which was as a chamber with closed door.

"I do not know what I might have taken to had I been made like other people, or what plans my mother cherished for me. But it soon became evident, as time passed and I grew no taller but more misshapen, that to bring me up to a profession would be but to render my deformity the more painful to myself. I spent, therefore, the first few years after I left school at home, keeping out of my father's way as much as possible, and cleaving fast to my mother. When she died, she left her little property between me and my brother. He had been brought up to my father's profession—that of an engineer. My father could not touch the principal of

this money, but neither, while he lived, could we the interest. I hardly know how I lived for the next three or four years—it must have been almost on charity, I think. My father was never at home, and but for the old woman who had been our only attendant all my life, I think very likely I should have starved. I spent my time mostly in reading—whatever I could lay my hands upon—and that not carelessly, but with such reflection as I was capable of. One thing I may mention, as showing how I was still carried in the same direction as before—that, without any natural turn for handicraft, I constructed for myself a secret place of carpenter's work in a corner of the garret, small indeed, but big enough for a couch on which I could lie, and a table as long as the couch. That was all the furniture. The walls were lined from top to bottom with books, mostly gathered from those lying about the house. Cunningly was the entrance to this nest contrived : I doubt if any one may have found it yet. If some imaginative dreamy boy has come upon it, what a find it must have been to him ! I could envy him the pleasure. There I always went to say my prayers and read my Bible. But sometimes *The Arabian Nights*, or some other book of entrancing human invention, would come between, and make me neglect both, and then I would feel bad and forsaken ; for as yet I knew little of the Heart to which I cried for shelter and warmth and defence.

"Somewhere in this time, at length, I began to feel dissatisfied, even displeased with myself. At first the feeling was vague, altogether undefined—a mere sense that I did not fit into things, that I was not what I ought to be, what was somehow and by the Authority required of me. This went on, began to gather roots rather than send them out, grew towards something more definite. I began to be aware that, heavy affliction as it was to be made so different from my fellows, my outward deformity was but a picture of my inward condition. There nothing was right. Many things which in theory I condemned, and in others despised, were yet a part of myself, or, at best, part of an evil disease cleaving fast unto me. I found myself envious and

revengeful and conceited. I discovered that I looked down on people whom I thought less clever than myself. Once I caught myself scorning a young fellow to whose disadvantage I knew nothing, except that God had made him handsome enough for a woman. All at once one day, with a sickening conviction it came upon me—with one of those sudden slackenings of the cord of self-consciousness, in which it doubles back quivering, and seems to break, while the man for an instant beholds his individuality apart from himself, is generally frightened at it, and always disgusted—a strange and indeed awful experience, which if it lasted longer than its allotted moment, might well drive a man mad who had no God to whom to offer back his individuality, in appeal against his double consciousness—it was in one of these cataleptic fits of the spirit, I say, that I first saw plainly what a contemptible little wretch I was, and writhed in the bright agony of conscious worthlessness.

"I now concluded that I had been nothing but a Pharisee and a hypocrite, praying with a bad heart, and that God saw me just as detestable as I saw myself, and despised me and was angry with me. I read my Bible more diligently than ever for a time, found in it nothing but denunciation and wrath, and soon dropped it in despair. I had already ceased to pray.

"One day a little boy mocked me. I flew into a rage, and, rendered by passion for the moment fleet and strong, pursued and caught him. Whatever may be a man's condition of defence against evil, I have learned that he cannot keep the good out of him. When the boy found himself in my clutches, he turned on me a look of such terror that it disarmed me at once, and, confounded and distressed to see a human being in such abject fear, a state which in my own experience I knew to be horrible, ashamed also that it should be before such a one as myself, I would have let him go instantly, but that I could not without having comforted him. But not a word of mine could get into his ears, and I saw at length that he was so *pre*-possessed, that every tone of kindness I uttered sounded to him a threat: nothing would

do but let him go. The moment he found himself free, he fled headlong into the pond, got out again, ran home, and told, with perfect truthfulness I believe, though absolute inaccuracy, that I threw him in. After this I tried to govern my temper, but found that the more I tried, the more even that I succeeded outwardly, that is, succeeded in suppressing the signs and deeds of wrath, the less could I keep down the wrath in my soul. I then tried never to think about myself at all, and read and read—not the Bible—more and more in order to forget myself. But ever through all my reading and thinking I was aware of the lack of harmony at the heart of me: I was not that which it was well to be; I was not at peace; I lacked; I was distorted; I was sick. Such were my feelings, not my reflections. All that time is as the memory of an unlovely dream—a dream of confusion and pain.

"One evening, in the twilight, I lay alone in my little den, not thinking, but with mind surrendered and passive to what might come into it. It was very hot—indeed sultry. My little skylight was open, but not a breath of air entered. What preceded I do not know, but the face of the terrified boy rose before me, or in me rather, and all at once I found myself, eagerly, painfully, at length almost in an agony, persuading him that I would not hurt him, but meant well and friendlily towards him. Again I had just let him go in despair, when the sweetest, gentlest, most refreshing little waft of air came in at the window and just went *being*, hardly moving, over my forehead. Its greeting was more delicate than even my mother's kiss, and yet it cooled my whole body. Now whatever, or whencesoever the link, if any be supposed needful to account for the fact, it kept below in the secret places of the springs, for I saw it not; but the next thought of which I was aware was, What if I misunderstood God the same way the boy had misunderstood me! and the next thing was to take my New Testament from the shelf on which I had laid it aside.

"Another evening of that same summer, I said to myself that I would begin at the beginning and read it through. I

had no definite idea in the resolve ; it seemed a good thing to do, and I would do it. It would serve towards keeping up my connection in a way with *things above.* I began, but did not that night get through the first chapter of St. Matthew. Conscientiously I read every word of the genealogy, but when I came to the twenty-third verse and read, 'Thou shalt call his name JESUS ; *for he shall save his people from their sins,*' I fell on my knees. No system of theology had come between me and a common-sense reading of the book. I did not for a moment imagine that to be saved from my sins meant to be saved from the punishment of them. That would have been no glad tidings to me. My sinfulness was ever before me, and often my sins too, and I loved them not, yet could not free myself of them. They were in me and of me, and how was I to part myself from that which came to me with my consciousness, which asserted itself in me as one with my consciousness ? I could not get behind myself so as to reach its root. But here was news of one who came from behind that root itself to deliver me from that in me which made being a bad thing ! Ah ! Mr. Wingfold, what if, after all the discoveries made, and all the theories set up and pulled down, amid all the commonplaces men call common sense, notwithstanding all the overpowering and excluding self-assertion of things that are seen, ever crying, 'Here we are, and save us there is nothing : the Unseen is the Unreal !'—what if, I say, notwithstanding all this, it should yet be that the strongest weapon a man can wield is prayer to one who made him ! What if the man who lifts up his heart to the unknown God even, be entering, amid the mockery of men who worship what they call natural law and science, into the region whence issues every law, and where the very material of science is born !

"To tell you all that followed, if I could recall and narrate it in order, would take hours. Suffice it that from that moment I was a student, a disciple. Soon to me also came then the two questions : *How do I know that there is a God at all ?* and *How am I to know that such a man as Jesus*

ever lived? I could answer neither. But in the meantime I was reading the story—was drawn to the Man there presented, and was trying to understand his being, and character, and principles of life and action. And to sum all in a word, many months had not passed ere I had forgotten to seek an answer to either question: they were in fact questions no longer: I had seen the man Jesus Christ, and in him had known the Father of him and of me. My dear sir, no conviction can be got, or if it could be got, would be of any sufficing value, through that dealer in second-hand goods, the intellect. If by it we could prove there is a God, it would be of small avail indeed: we must see him and know him, to know that he was not a demon. But I know no other way of knowing that there is a God but that which reveals *what* he is—the only idea that could be God—shows him in his own self-proving existence—and that way is Jesus Christ as he revealed himself on earth, and as he is revealed afresh to every heart that seeks to know the truth concerning him."

A pause followed—a solemn one—and then again Polwarth spoke.

"Either the whole frame of existence," he said, "is a wretched, miserable unfitness, a chaos with dreams of a world, a chaos in which the higher is for ever subject to the lower, or it is an embodied idea growing towards perfection in him who is the one perfect creative Idea, the Father of lights, who suffers himself that he may bring his many sons into the glory which is his own glory."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

"BUT," said Wingfold, "—only pray do not think I am opposing you; I am in the straits you have left so far behind—how am I to know that I should not merely have wrought myself up to the believing of that which I should like to be true?"

"Leave that question, my dear sir, until you know what that really is which you want to believe. I do not imagine that you have yet more than the merest glimmer of the nature of that concerning which you, for the very reason that you know not what it is, most rationally doubt. Is a man to refuse to withdraw his curtains lest some flash in his own eyes should deceive him with a vision of morning while yet it is night? The truth to the soul is as light to the eyes: you may be deceived, and mistake something else for light, but you can never fail to know the light when it really comes."

"What then would you have of me? What am I to *do?*" said Wingfold, who, having found his master, was docile as a child, but had not laid firm enough hold upon what he had last said.

"I repeat," said Polwarth, "that the community whose servant you are was not founded to promulgate or defend the doctrine of the existence of a Deity, but to perpetuate the assertion of a man that he was the son and only revealer of

the Father of men, a fact, if it be a fact, which precludes the question of the existence of a God, because it includes the answer to it. Your business, therefore, even as one who finds himself in your unfortunate position as a clergyman, is to make yourself acquainted with that man : he will be to you nobody save in revealing, through knowledge of his inmost heart, the Father to you. Take then your New Testament as if you had never seen it before, and read—to find out. If in him you fail to meet God, then go to your consciousness of the race, your metaphysics, your Plato, your Spinosa. Till then, this point remains : there was a man who said he knew him, and that if you would give heed to him you too should know him. The record left of him is indeed scanty, yet enough to disclose what manner of man he was—his principles, his ways of looking at things, his thoughts of his Father and his brethren and the relations between them, of man's business in life, his destiny, and his hopes."

"I see plainly," answered the curate, "that what you say I must do. But how, while on duty as a clergyman, I *do not know*. How am I, with the sense of the unreality of my position ever growing upon me, and my utter inability to supply the wants of the congregation save from my uncle's store of dry provender, which it takes me a great part of my time so to modify as, in using it, to avoid direct lying—with all this pressing upon me, and making me restless and irritable and self-contemptuous, how *am* I to set myself to such solemn work, wherein a man must surely be clear-eyed and single-hearted if he would succeed in his quest? I must resign my curacy."

Mr. Polwarth thought a little.

"It would be well, I think, to retain it for a time at least while you search," he said. "If you do not within a month see prospect of finding him, then resign. In any case, your continuance in the service must depend on your knowledge of the Lord of it, and his will concerning you."

"May not a prejudice in favour of my profession blind and deceive me?"

"I think it will rather make *you* doubtful of conclusions that support it."

"I will go and try," said Wingfold, rising; "but I fear I am not the man to make discoveries in such high regions."

"You are the man to find what fits your own need if the thing be there," said Polwarth. "But to ease your mind for the task: I know pretty well some of our best English writers of the more practical and poetic sort in theology—the two qualities go together—and if you will do me the favour to come again to-morrow, I shall be able, I trust, to provide you wherewithal to feed your flock, free of that duplicity which, be it as common as the surplice, and as fully connived as laughed at by that flock, is yet duplicity There is no law that sermons shall be the preacher's own, but there is an eternal law against all manner of humbug. Pardon the word."

"I will not attempt to thank you," said Wingfold, "but I will do as you tell me. You are the first real friend I have ever had—except my brother, who is dead."

"Perhaps you have had more friends than you are aware of. You owe something to the man, for instance, who, with his outspoken antagonism, roused you first to a sense of what was lacking to you."

"I hope I shall be grateful to God for it some day," returned Wingfold. "I cannot say that I feel much obligation to Mr. Bascombe. And yet, when I think of it—perhaps—I don't know—what ought a man to be more grateful for than honesty?"

After a word of arrangement for next day the curate took his leave, assuredly with a stronger feeling of simple genuine respect than he had ever yet felt for man. Rachel bade him good night with her fine eyes filled with tears, which suited their expression, for they always seemed to be looking through sorrow to something beyond it.

"If this be a type of the way the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children," said the curate to himself, "there must be more in the progression of history than political economy can explain. It would drive us to believe in an

economy wherein rather the well-being of the whole was the result of individual treatment, and not the well-being of the individual the result of the management of the whole?"

I will not count the milestones along the road on which Wingfold now began to journey. Some of the stages, however, will appear in the course of my story. When he came to any stiff bit of collar-work, the little man generally appeared with an extra horse. Every day during the rest of that week he saw his new friends.

CHAPTER XX.

A STRANGE SERMON.

ON the Sunday the curate walked across the churchyard to morning prayer very much as if the bells instead of ringing the people to church had been tolling for his execution. But if he was going to be hanged, he would at least die like a gentleman, confessing his sin. Only he would it were bedtime and all well. He trembled so when he stood up to read that he could not tell whether or not he was speaking in a voice audible to the congregation. But as his hour drew near, the courage to meet it drew near also, and when at length he ascended the pulpit stairs, he was able to cast a glance across the sea of heads to learn whether the little man was in the poor seats. But he looked for the big head in vain.

When he read his text, it was to a congregation as listless and indifferent as it was wont to be. He had not gone far, however, before that change of mental condition was visible on the faces before him, which a troop of horses would have shown by a general forward swivelling of the ears. Wonderful to tell, they were actually listening. But in truth it was no wonder, for seldom in any, and assuredly never in that church, had there been heard such an exordium to a sermon.

His text was, "*Confessing your faults one to another.*" Having read it with a return of the former trembling, and

paused, his brain suddenly seemed for a moment to reel under a wave of extinction that struck it, then to float away upon it, and then to dissolve in it, as it interpenetrated its whole mass, annihilating thought and utterance together. But with a mighty effort of the will, in which he seemed to come as near as man could come to the willing of his own existence, he recovered himself and went on. To do justice to this effort, my reader must remember that he was a shy man, and that he knew his congregation but too well for an unsympathetic one—whether from their fault or his own mattered little for the nonce. It had been hard enough to make up his mind to the attempt when alone in his study, or rather, to tell the truth, in his chamber, but to carry out his resolve in the face of so many faces, and in spite of a cowardly brain, was an effort and a victory indeed. Yet after all, upon second thoughts, I see that the true resolve was the victory, sweeping shyness and every other opposing weakness along with it. But it wanted courage of yet another sort to make of his resolve a fact, and his courage, in that kind as well, had never yet been put to the test or trained by trial. He had not been a fighting boy at school; he had never had the chance of riding to hounds; he had never been in a shipwreck or a house on fire; had never been waked from a sound sleep with a demand for his watch and money; yet one who had passed creditably through all these trials might still have carried a doubting conscience to his grave rather than face what Wingfold now confronted.

From the manuscript before him he read thus:

"'Confess your faults one to another.'—This command of the apostle, my hearers, ought to justify me in doing what I fear some of you may consider almost as a breach of morals —talking of myself in the pulpit. But in the pulpit has a wrong been done, and in the pulpit shall it be confessed. From Sunday to Sunday, standing on this spot, I have read to you, without word of explanation, as if they formed the message I had sought and found for you, the thoughts and words of another. Doubtless they were better than any I could have given you from my own mind or experience, and

the act had been a righteous one, had I told you the truth concerning them. But that truth I did not tell you. At last, through words of honest expostulation, the voice of a friend whose wounds are faithful, I have been aroused to a knowledge of the wrong I have been doing. Therefore I now confess it. I am sorry. I will do so no more.

"But, brethren, I have only a little garden on a bare hillside, and it hath never yet borne me any fruit fit to offer for your acceptance; also, my heart is troubled about many things, and God hath humbled me. I beg of you, therefore, to bear with me for a little while, if, doing what is but lawful and expedient both, I break through the bonds of custom in order to provide you with food convenient for you. Should I fail in this, I shall make room for a better man. But for your bread of this day, I go gleaning openly in other men's fields—fields into which I could not have found my way, in time at least for your necessities, and where I could not have gathered such full ears of wheat, barley, and oats but for the more than assistance of the same friend who warned me of the wrong I was doing both you and myself. Right ancient fields are some of them, where yet the ears lie thick for the gleaner. To continue my metaphor: I will lay each handful before you with the name of the field where I gathered it; and together they will serve to show what some of the wisest and best shepherds of the English flock have believed concerning the duty of confessing our faults."

He then proceeded to read the extracts which Mr. Polwarth had helped him to find—and arrange, not chronologically, but after an idea of growth. Each handful, as he called it, he prefaced with one or two words concerning him in whose field he had gleaned it.

His voice steadied and strengthened as he read. Renewed contact with the minds of those vanished teachers gave him a delight which infused itself into the uttered words, and made them also joyful; and if the curate preached to no one else in the congregation, certainly he preached to himself, and before it was done had entered into a thorough enjoyment of the sermon.

A few of the congregation were disappointed because they had looked for a justification and enforcement of the confessional, thinking the change in the curate could only have come from that portion of the ecclesiastical heavens towards which they themselves turned their faces. A few others were scandalised at such an innovation on the part of a young man who was only a curate. Many, however, declared that it was the most interesting sermon they had ever heard in their lives—which perhaps was not saying much.

Mrs. Ramshorn made a class by herself. Not having yet learned to like Wingfold, and being herself one of the craft, with a knowledge of not a few of the secrets of the clerical—prison-house shall I call it, or green-room ?—she was indignant with the presumptuous young man who degraded the pulpit to a level with the dock. Who cared for him? What was it to a congregation of respectable people, many of them belonging to the first county-families, that he, a mere curate, should have committed what he fancied a crime against them! He should have waited until it had been laid to his charge. Couldn't he repent of his sins, whatever they were, without making a boast of them in the pulpit, and exposing them to the eyes of a whole congregation? She had known people make a stock-in-trade of their sins ! What was it to them whether the washy stuff he gave them by way of sermons was his own foolishness or some other noodle's ! Nobody would have troubled himself to inquire into his honesty if he had but held his foolish tongue. Better men than he had preached other people's sermons, and never thought it worth mentioning. And what worse were the people? The only harm lay in letting them know it ; that brought the profession into disgrace, and prevented the good the sermon would otherwise have done, besides giving the enemies of the truth a handle against the church. And then such a thing to call a sermon ! As well take a string of blown eggs to market ! Thus she expatiated, half the way home, before either of her companions found an opportunity of saying a word.

"I am sorry to differ from you, aunt," said Helen. "I thought the sermon a very interesting one. He read beautifully."

"For my part," said Bascombe, who was now a regular visitor from Saturdays to Mondays, "I used to think the fellow a muff, but, by Jove! I've changed my mind. If ever there was a plucky thing to do, that was one, and there ain't many men, let me tell you, aunt, who would have the pluck for it.—It's my belief, Helen," he went on, turning to her and speaking in a lower tone, "I've had the honour of doing that fellow some good. I gave him my mind about honesty pretty plainly the first time I saw him. And who can tell what may come next when a fellow once starts in the right way! We shall have him with us before long. I must look out for something for him, for of course he'll be in a devil of a fix without his profession."

"I'm so glad you think with me, George!" said Helen. "There was always something I was inclined to like about Mr. Wingfold. Indeed I should have liked him quite if he had not been so painfully modest."

"Notwithstanding his sheepishness, though," returned Bascombe, "there was a sort of quiet self-satisfaction about him, and the way he always said *Don't you think?* as if he were Socrates taking advantage of Mr. Green and softly guiding him into a trap, which I confess made me set him down as conceited; but, as I say, I begin to change my mind. By Jove! he must have worked pretty hard too in the dust-bins to get together all those bits of gay rag and resplendent crockery!"

"You heard him say he had help."

"No, I don't remember that."

"It came just after that pretty simile about gleaning in old fields."

"I remember the simile, for I thought it a very absurd one—as if fields would lie gleanable for generations!"

"To be sure—now you point it out!" acquiesced Helen.

"The grain would have sprouted and borne harvests a

hundred. If a man *will* use figures, he should be careful to give them legs. I wonder who he got to help him—not the rector, I suppose?"

"The rector!" echoed Mrs. Ramshorn, who had been listening to the young people's remarks with a smile of quiet scorn on her lip, thinking what an advantage was experience, even if it could not make up for the loss of youth and beauty—"the last man in the world to lend himself to such a miserable makeshift and pretence! Without brains enough even to fancy himself able to write a sermon of his own, he flies to the dead,—to their very coffin as it were—and I will not say *steals* from them, for he does it openly, not having even shame enough to conceal his shame!"

"I like a man to hold his face to what he does, or thinks either," said Bascombe.

"Ah! George," returned his aunt, in tones of wisdom, "by the time you have had my experience you will have learned a little prudence."

Meantime, so far as his aunt was concerned, George did use prudence, for in her presence he did not hold his face to what he thought. He said to himself it would do her no good. She was so prejudiced! and it might interfere with his visits. She, for her part, never had the slightest doubt of his orthodoxy: was he not the son of a clergyman and canon—a grandson of the church herself?

CHAPTER XXI.

A THUNDERBOLT.

SOMETIMES a thunderbolt, as men call it, will shoot from a clear sky; and sometimes, into the midst of a peaceful family, or a yet quieter individuality, without warning of gathered storm above or slightest tremble of earthquake beneath, will fall a terrible fact, and from the moment everything is changed. That family or that life is no more what it was—probably never more can be what it was. Better it ought to be, worse it may be—which, depends upon itself. But its spiritual weather is altered. The air is thick with cloud, and cannot weep itself clear. There may come a gorgeous sunset, though.

It were a truism for one who believes in God to say that such catastrophes, so rending, so frightful, never come but where they are needed. The Power of Life is not content that they who live in and by him should live poorly and contemptibly. If the presence of low thoughts which he repudiates, yet makes a man miserable, how must it be with him if they who live and move and have their being in him are mean and repulsive, or alienated through self-sufficiency and slowness of heart?

I cannot report much progress in Helen during the months of winter and spring. But if one wakes at last, wakes at all, who shall dare cast the stone at him—that he

ought to have awaked sooner? What man who is awake will dare to say that he roused himself the first moment it became possible to him? The main and plain and worst, perhaps only condemnation, is—that when people do wake they do not get up. At the same time, however, I can hardly doubt that Helen was keeping the law of a progress slow as the growth of an iron-tree.

Nothing had ever yet troubled her. She had never been in love, could hardly be said to be in love now. She went regularly to church, and I believe said her prayers night and morning—yet felt no indignation at the doctrines and theories propounded by George Bascombe. She regarded them as "George's ideas," and never cared to ask whether they were true or not, at the same time that they were becoming to her by degrees as like truth as falsehood can ever be. For to the untruthful mind the false *can* seem the true. Meantime she was not even capable of giving him the credit he deserved, in that, holding the opinions he held, he yet advocated a life spent for the community—without, as I presume, deriving much inspiration thereto from what he himself would represent as the ground of all conscientious action, the consideration, namely, of its reaction upon its originator. Still farther was it from entering the field of her vision that possibly some of the good which distinguished George's unbelief from that of his brother ephemera of the last century was owing to the deeper working of that leaven which he denounced as the poisonous root whence sprung all the evil diseases that gnawed at the heart of society.

One night she sat late, making her aunt a cap. The one sign of originality in her was the character of her millinery, of which kind of creation she was fond, displaying therein both invention as to form and perception as to effect, combined with lightness and deftness of execution. She was desirous of completing it before the next morning, which was that of her aunt's birthday. They had had friends to dine with them who had stayed rather late, and it was now getting towards one o'clock. But Helen was not easily tired, and was not given to abandoning what she had undertaken; so

she sat working away, and thinking, not of George Bascombe, but of one whom she loved better—far better—her brother Leopold. But she was thinking of him not quite so comfortably as usual. Certain anxieties she had ground for concerning him had grown stronger, for the time since she heard from him had grown very long.

All at once her work ceased, her hands were arrested, her posture grew rigid: she was listening. *Had* she heard a noise outside her window?

My reader may remember that it opened on a balcony, which was at the same time the roof of a verandah that went along the back of the house, and had a stair at one end to the garden.

Helen was not easily frightened, and had stopped her needle only that she might listen the better. She heard nothing. Of course it was but a fancy! Her hands went on again with their work.—But that was really very like a tap at the window! And now her heart did beat a little faster, if not with fear, then with something very like it, in which perhaps some foreboding was mingled. But she was not a woman to lay down her arms upon the inroad of a vague terror. She quietly rose, and, saying to herself it must be one of the pigeons that haunted the balcony, laid her work on the table, and went to the window. As she drew one of the curtains a little aside to peep, the tap was plainly and hurriedly though softly repeated, and at once she swept it back. There was the dim shadow of a man's head upon the blind, cast there by an old withered moon low in the west! Perhaps it was something in the shape of the shadow that made her pull up the blind so hurriedly, and yet with something of the awe with which we take "the face-cloth from the face." Yes, there was a face!—frightful, not as that of a corpse, but as that of a spectre from whose soul the scars of his mortal end have never passed away. Helen did not scream—her throat seemed to close and her heart to cease. But her eyes continued movelessly fixed on the face even after she knew it was the face of her brother, and the eyes of the face kept staring

back into hers through the glass with such a look of concentrated eagerness that they seemed no more organs of vision but caves of hunger, nor was there a movement of the lips towards speech. The two gazed at each other for a moment of rigid silence. The glass that separated them might have been the veil that divides those who call themselves the living from those whom they call the dead.

It was but a moment by the clock, though to the after consciousness it seemed space immeasurable. She came to herself, and slowly, noiselessly, though with tremulous hand, undid the sash and opened the window. Nothing divided them now, yet he stood as before, staring into her face. Presently his lips began to move, but no words came from them.

In Helen horror had already roused the instinct of secrecy. She put out her two hands, took his face between them, and said in a hurried whisper, calling him by the pet name she had given him when a child,

"Come in, Poldie, and tell me all about it."

Her voice seemed to wake him. Slowly, with the movement of one half paralysed, he shoved and dragged himself over the window-sill, dropped himself on the floor inside, and lay there, looking up in her face like a hunted animal, that hoped he had found a refuge, but doubted. Seeing him so exhausted, she turned from him to go and get some brandy, but a low cry of agony drew her back. His head was raised from the floor and his hands were stretched out, while his face entreated her, as plainly as if he had spoken, not to leave him. She knelt and would have kissed him, but he turned his face from her with an expression which seemed of disgust.

"Poldie," she said, "I *must* go and get you something. Don't be afraid. They are all sound asleep."

The grasp with which he had clutched her dress relaxed, and his hand fell by his side. She rose at once and went, creeping through the slumberous house, light and noiseless as a shadow, but with a heart that seemed not her own lying hard in her bosom. As she went she had to struggle to

rouse and compose herself, for she could not think. An age seemed to have passed since she heard the clock strike twelve. One thing was clear—her brother had been doing something wrong, and dreading discovery had fled to her. The moment this conviction made itself plain to her she drew herself up with the great deep breath of a vow, as strong as it was silent and undefined, that he should not have come to her in vain. Silent-footed as a beast of prey, silent-handed as a thief, lithe in her movements, her eye flashing with the new-kindled instinct of motherhood to the orphan of her father, it was as if her soul had been suddenly raised to a white heat, which rendered her body elastic and responsive.

CHAPTER XXII.

LEOPOLD.

SHE re-entered her room with the gait of a new-born goddess treading the air. Her brother was yet prostrate where she had left him. He raised himself on his elbow, seized with trembling hand the glass she offered him, swallowed the brandy at a gulp, and sank again on the floor. The next instant he sprang to his feet, cast a terrified look at the window, bounded to the door and locked it, then ran to his sister, threw his arms about her, and clung to her like a trembling child. But ever his eyes kept turning to the window.

Though now twenty years of age, and at his full height, he was hardly so tall as Helen. Swarthy of complexion, his hair dark as the night, his eyes large and lustrous, with what Milton calls 'quel sereno fulgor d' amabil nero,' his frame nervous and slender, he looked compact and small beside her.

She did her utmost to quiet him, unconsciously using the same words and tones with which she had soothed his passions when he was a child. All at once he raised his head and drew himself back from her arms with a look of horror, then put his hand over his eyes as if her face had been a mirror and he had seen himself in it.

"What is that on your wristband, Leopold?" she asked. "Have you hurt yourself?"

The youth cast an indescribable look on his hand, but it was not that which turned Helen so deadly sick: with her question had come to her the ghastly suspicion that the blood she saw was not his, and she felt guilty of an unpardonable, wicked wrong against him. But she would never, never believe it! A sister suspect her only brother of such a crime! Yet her arms dropped and let him go. She stepped back a pace, and of themselves, as it were, her eyes went wandering and questioning all over him, and saw that his clothes were torn and soiled—stained—who could tell with what?

He stood for a moment still and submissive to their search, with face downcast. Then, suddenly flashing his eyes on her, he said, in a voice that seemed to force its way through earth that choked it back,

"Helen, I am a murderer, and they are after me. They will be here before daylight."

He dropped on his knees, and clasped hers.

"O sister! sister! save me, save me!" he cried in a voice of agony.

Helen stood without response, for to stand took all her strength. How long she fought that horrible sickness, knowing that, if she moved an inch, turned from it a moment, yielded a hair's-breadth, it would throw her senseless on the floor and the noise of her fall would rouse the house, she never could even conjecture. All was dark before her, as if her gaze had been on the under side of her coffin-lid, and her brain sank and swayed and swung in the coils of the white snake that was sucking at her heart. At length the darkness thinned; it grew a gray mist; the face of her boy-brother glimmered up through it, like that of Dives in hell-fire to his guardian-angel as he hung lax-winged and faint in the ascending smoke. The mist thinned, and at length she caught a glimmer of his pleading, despairing, self-horrified eyes: all the mother in her nature rushed to the aid of her struggling will; her heart gave a great heave; the blood ascended to her white brain, and flushed it with rosy life; her body was once more reconciled and obedient; her

hands went forth, took his head between them, and pressed it against her.

"Poldie, dear," she said, "be calm and reasonable, and I will do all I can for you. Here, take this.—And now, answer me one question."

"You won't give me up, Helen?"

"No. I will not."

"Swear it, Helen."

"Ah! my poor Poldie, is it come to this between you and me?"

"Swear it, Helen."

"So help me God, I will not!" murmured Helen, looking up.

Leopold rose, and again stood quiet before her, but again with down-bent head, like a prisoner about to receive sentence.

"Do you mean what you said a moment since—that the police are in search of you?" asked Helen with forced calmness.

"They must be. They must have been after me for days—I don't know how many. They will be here soon. I can't think how I have escaped them so long. Hark! Isn't that a noise at the street-door? No, no! There's a shadow on the curtains! No! it's my eyes; they've cheated me a thousand times. Helen! I did not try to hide her; they must have found her long ago."

"My God!" cried Helen, but checked the scream that sought to follow the cry.

"There was an old shaft near," he went on hurriedly. "If I had thrown her down that they would never have found her, for there must be choke-damp at the bottom of it enough to kill a thousand of them. But I could not bear the thought of sending the lovely thing down there—even to save my life."

He was growing wild again, but the horror had again laid hold upon Helen, and she stood speechless, staring at him.

"Hide me, hide me, Helen!" he pleaded. "Perhaps you think I am mad. Would to God I were! Sometimes

I think I must be. But this I tell you is no madman's fancy. If you take it for that, you will bring me to the gallows.—So, if you will see me hanged—"

He sat down and folded his arms.

"Hush, Poldie, hush!" cried Helen, in an agonised whisper. "I am only thinking what I can best do. I cannot hide you here, for if my aunt knew, she would betray you by her terrors; and if she did not know, and those men came, she would help them to search every corner of the house. Otherwise there might be a chance."

Again she was silent for a few moments, then, seeming suddenly to have made up her mind, went softly to the door.

"Don't leave me!" cried Leopold.

"Hush! I must. I know now what to do. Be quiet here until I come back."

Slowly, cautiously, she unlocked it, and left the room. In three or four minutes she returned, carrying a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine. To her dismay Leopold had vanished. Presently he came creeping out from under the bed, looking so abject that Helen could not help a pang of shame. But the next moment the love of the sister, the tender compassion of the woman, returned in full tide and swallowed up the unsightly thing. The more abject he was the more was he to be pitied and ministered to.

"Here, Poldie," she said, "you carry the bread, and I will take the wine. You must eat something, or you will be ill."

As she spoke she locked the door again. Then she put a dark shawl over her head, and fastened it under her chin. Her white face shone out from it like the moon from a dark cloud.

"Follow me, Poldie," she said, and putting out the candles, went to the window. He obeyed without question, carrying the loaf she had put into his hands. The window-sash rested on a little door; she opened it, and stepped on the balcony. As soon as her brother had followed her, she closed it again, drew down the sash, and led the way to the garden, and so, by the door in the sunk fence, out upon the meadows.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE REFUGE.

THE night was very dusky, but Helen knew perfectly the way she was going. A strange excitement possessed her, and lifted her above all personal fear. The instant she found herself in the open air, her faculties seemed to come preternaturally awake, and her judgment to grow quite cool. She congratulated herself that there had been no rain, and the ground would not betray their steps. There was enough of light in the sky to see the trees against it, and partly by their outlines she guided herself to the door in the park-paling, whence she went as straight as she could for the deserted house. Remembering well her brother's old dislike to the place, she said nothing of their destination, but when he suddenly stopped, she knew that it had dawned upon him. For one moment he hung back, but a stronger and more definite fear lay behind, and he went on.

Emerging from the trees on the edge of the hollow, they looked down, but it was too dark to see the mass of the house, or the slightest gleam from the surface of the lake. All was silent as a deserted churchyard, and they went down the slope as if it had been the descent to Hades. Arrived at the wall of the garden, they followed its buttressed length until they came to a tall narrow gate of wrought iron, almost consumed with rust, and standing half open. By this they

passed into the desolate garden, whose misery in the daytime was like that of a ruined soul, but now hidden in the night's black mantle. Through the straggling bushes with their arms they forced and with their feet they felt their way to the front door of the house, the steps to which, from the effects of various floods, were all out of the level in different directions. The door was unlocked as usual, needing only a strong push to open it, and they entered. How awfully still it seemed !—much stiller than the open air, though that had seemed noiseless. There was not a rat or a black beetle in the place. They groped their way through the hall and up the wide staircase, which gave not one creak in answer to their needlessly careful footsteps : not a soul was within a mile of them. Helen had taken Leopold by the hand, and she now led him straight to the closet whence the hidden room opened. He made no resistance, for the covering wings of the darkness had protection in them. How desolate must the soul be that welcomes such protection ! But when, knowing that thence no ray could reach the outside, she struck a light, and the spot where he had so often shuddered was laid bare to his soul, he gave a cry and turned and would have rushed away. Helen caught him ; he yielded, and allowed her to lead him into the room. There she lighted a candle, and as it came gradually alive, it shed a pale yellow light around, and revealed a bare chamber with a bedstead and the remains of a moth-eaten mattress in a corner. Leopold threw himself upon it, uttering a sound that more resembled a choked scream than a groan. Helen sat down beside him, took his head on her lap, and sought to soothe him with such tender loving words as had never before found birth in her heart, not to say crossed her lips. She took from her pocket a dainty morsel, and tried to make him eat, but in vain. Then she poured him out a cupful of wine. He drank it eagerly, and asked for more, which she would not give him. But instead of comforting him, it seemed only to rouse him to fresh horror. He clung to his sister as a child clings to the nurse who has just been telling him an evil tale, and ever his face would keep turning from

her to the door with a look of frightful anticipation. She consoled him with all her ingenuity, assured him that for the present he was perfectly safe, and, thinking it would encourage a sense of concealment, reminded him of the trap in the floor of the closet and the little chamber underneath. But at that he started up with glaring eyes.

"Helen! I remember now," he cried. "I knew it at the time! Don't you know I never could endure the place? I foresaw, as plainly as I see you now, that one day I should be crouching here for safety with a hideous crime on my conscience. I told you so, Helen, at the time. Oh! how could you bring me here?"

He threw himself down again, and hid his face on her lap.

With a fresh inroad of dismay Helen thought he must be going mad, for this was the merest trick of his imagination. Certainly he had always dreaded the place, but never a word of that sort had he said to her. Yet there was a shadow of possible comfort in the thought—for what if the whole thing should prove an hallucination! But whether real or not, she must have his story.

"Come, dearest Poldie, darling brother!" she said, "you have not yet told me what it is. What is the terrible thing you have done? I daresay it's nothing so very bad after all!"

"There's the light coming!" he said in a dull hollow voice, "—the morning! always the morning coming again!"

"No, no, dear Poldie!" she returned. "There is no window here—at least it only looks on the back stair, high above heads; and the morning is a long way off."

"How far?" he asked, staring in her eyes; "twenty years? That was just when I was born! Oh! that I could enter a second time into my mother's womb, and never be born! Why are we sent into this cursed world? I would God had never made it. What was the good? Couldn't he have let well alone?"

He was silent. She must get him to sleep.

It was as if a second soul had been given her to supplement the first, and enable her to meet what would otherwise have been the exorbitant demands now made upon her. With an effort of the will such as she could never before have even imagined, she controlled the anguish of her own spirit, and, softly stroking the head of the poor lad, which had again sought her lap, compelled herself to sing him for lullaby a song of which in his childhood he had been very fond, and with which, in all the importance of imagined motherhood, she had often sung him to sleep. And the old influence was potent yet. In a few minutes the fingers which clutched her hand relaxed, and she knew by his breathing that he slept. She sat still as a stone, not daring to move, hardly daring breath enough to keep her alive, lest she should rouse him from his few blessed moments of self-nothingness, during which the tide of the all-infolding ocean of peace was free to flow into the fire-torn cave of his bosom. She sat motionless thus, until it seemed as if for very weariness she must drop in a heap on the floor, but that the aches and pains which went through her in all directions held her body together like ties and rivets. She had never before known what weariness was, and now she knew it for all her life. But like an irritant, her worn body clung about her soul and dulled it to its own grief, thus helping it to a pitiful kind of repose. How long she sat thus she could not tell—she had no means of knowing, but it seemed hours on hours, and yet, though the nights were now short, the darkness had not begun to thin. But when she thought how little access the light had to that room, she began to grow uneasy lest she should be missed from her own, or seen on her way back to it. At length some involuntary movement woke him. He started to his feet with a look of wild gladness. But there was scarcely time to recognise it before it vanished.

"My God, it is true, then!" he shrieked. "O Helen! I dreamed that I was innocent—that I had but dreamed I had done it. Tell me that I'm dreaming now. Tell me! tell me! Tell me that I am no murderer!"

As he spoke he seized her shoulder with a fierce grasp, and shook her as if trying to wake her from the silence of a lethargy.

"I hope you are innocent, my darling. But in any case I will do all I can to protect you," said Helen. "Only I shall never be able unless you control yourself sufficiently to let me go home."

"No, Helen!" he cried; "you must not leave me. If you do I shall go mad. *She* will come instead."

Helen shuddered inwardly, but kept her outward composure.

"If I stay with you, just think, dearest, what will happen," she said. "I shall be missed, and all the country will be raised to look for me. They will think I have been—." She checked herself.

"And so you might be—so might any one," he cried, "so long as I am loose—like the Rajah's man-eating horse. O God! it has come to this!" And he hid his face in his hands.

"And then you see, my Poldie," Helen went on as calmly as she could, "they would come here and find us: and I don't know what might come next."

"Yes, yes, Helen! Go, go directly. Leave me this instant," he said hurriedly, and took her by the shoulders, as if he would push her from the room, but went on talking. "It must be, I know; but when the light comes I shall go mad. Would to God I might, for the day is worse than the darkness; then I see my own black against the light. Now go, Helen. But you *will* come back to me as soon as ever you can? How shall I know when to begin to look for you? What o'clock is it? My watch has never been—since—. Ugh! the light will be here soon. Helen, I know not what hell is.—Ah! yes." As he spoke he had been feeling in one of his pockets. "I will not be taken alive.—Can you whistle, Helen?"

"Yes, Poldie," answered Helen, trembling. "Don't you remember teaching me?"

"Yes, yes. Then, when you come near the house,

whistle, and go on whistling, for if I hear a step without any whistling I shall kill myself."

"What have you got there?" she asked, in renewed terror, noticing that he kept his hand in the breast-pocket of his coat.

"Only the knife," he answered calmly.

"Give it to me," she said, calmly too.

He laughed, and the laugh was more terrible than any cry.

"No; I'm not so green as that," he said. "My knife is my only friend! Who is to take care of me when you are away? Ha! ha!"

She saw that the comfort of the knife must not be denied him. Nor did she fear any visit that might drive him to its use—except indeed the police *were* to come upon him—and then what better could he do? she thought.

"Well, well, I will not plague you," she said. "Lie down and I will cover you with my shawl, and you can fancy it my arms round you. I will come to you as soon as ever I can."

He obeyed. She spread her shawl over him and kissed him.

"Thank you, Helen," he said quietly.

"Pray to God to deliver you, dear," she said.

"He can do that only by killing me," he returned. "I will pray for that. But do you go, Helen. I will try to bear my misery for your sake."

He followed her from the room with eyes out of which looked the very demon of silent despair.

I will not further attempt to set forth his feelings. The incredible, the impossible, had become a fact—*and he was the man.* He who knows the relief of waking from a dream of crime to the jubilation of recovered innocence, to the sunlight that blots out the thing as untrue, may by help of that conceive the misery of a delicate nature suddenly filled with the clear assurance of horrible guilt. Such a misery no waking but one that annihilated the past could ever console. Yes, there is yet an awaking—if a man might

but attain unto it—an awaking into a region whose very fields are full of the harmony sovereign to console, not merely for having suffered—that needs little consoling—but for having inflicted the deepest wrong.

The moment Helen was out of sight Leopold drew a small silver box from an inner pocket, eyed it with the eager look of a hungry animal, took from it a portion of a certain something, put it in his mouth, closed his eyes, and lay still.

CHAPTER XXIV

HELEN WITH A SECRET.

WHEN Helen came out into the corridor she saw that the day was breaking. A dim, dreary light filled the dismal house, but the candle had prevented her from perceiving the little of it that could enter that room withdrawn. A pang of fear shot to her soul, and like a belated spectre or a roused somnambulist she fled across the park. It was all so like a horrible dream, from which she must wake in bed! yet she knew there was no such hope for her. Her darling lay in that frightful house, and if any one should see her it might be death to him. But it was yet very early, and two hours would pass before any of the workmen would be on their way to the new house. Yet, like a murderer shaken out of the earth by the light, she fled. When she was safe in her own room, ere she could get into bed, she once more turned deadly sick, and next knew by the agonies of coming to herself that she had fainted.

A troubled, weary, excited sleep followed. She woke with many a start, as if she had sinned in sleeping, and instantly, for very weariness, dosed off again. How kind is weariness sometimes! It is like the Father's hand laid a little heavy on the heart to make it still. But her dreams were full of torture, and even when she had no definite dream, she was haunted by the vague presence of blood. It was

considerably past her usual time for rising when at length she heard her maid in the room. She got up wearily, but, beyond the heaviest of hearts and a general sense of misery, nothing ailed her ; nor even did her head ache.

But she had lived an age since she woke last ; and the wonder was, not that she felt so different, but that she should be aware of being the same person as before notwithstanding all that had passed. Her business now was to keep herself from thinking until breakfast should be over. She must hold the "ebony box" of last night close shut even from her own eyes, lest the demons of which it was full should rush out and darken the world about her. She hurried to her bath for strength ; the friendly water would rouse her to the present, make the past recede like a dream, and give her courage to face the future. Her very body seemed defiled by the knowledge that was within it. Alas ! how must poor Leopold feel then ! But she must not think.

All the time she was dressing her thoughts kept hovering round the awful thing like moths around a foul flame, from which she could not drive them away. Ever and again she said to herself that she must not, yet ever and again she found herself peeping through the chinks of the thought-chamber at the terrible thing inside—the form of which she could not see—saw only the colour—red—red, mingled with ghastly whiteness. In all the world her best-loved, her brother, the child of her grandfather, was the only one who knew how that thing came there.

But while Helen's being was in such tumult that she could never more be the cool, indifferent, self-contented person she had hitherto been, her old habits and forms of existence were now of endless help to the retaining of her composure and the covering of her secret. A dim gleam of gladness woke in her at the sight of the unfinished cap, than which she could not have a better excuse for her lateness, and when she showed it to her aunt with the wish of many happy returns of the day, no second glance from Mrs. Ramshorn added to her uneasiness.

But oh ! how terribly the time crept in its going ! for she dared not approach the deserted house while the daylight kept watching it like a dog. And what if Leopold should have destroyed himself in the madness of his despair before she could go to him ! She had not a friend to help her. George Bascombe ?—she shuddered at the thought of him. With his grand ideas of duty, he would be for giving up Leopold that very moment ! Naturally the clergyman was the one to go to—and Mr. Wingfold had himself done wrong. But he had confessed it ! No—he was a poor creature, and would not hold his tongue ! She shook at every knock at the door, every ring at the bell, lest it should be the police. To be sure he had been comparatively little there, and naturally they would seek him first at Goldswyre ; but where next ? At Glaston, of course. Every time a servant entered the room she turned away lest her ears should make her countenance a traitor. The police might be watching the house, and might follow her when she went to him ! With her opera-glass she examined the meadow, then ran to the bottom of the garden, and lying down, peered over the sunk fence. But not a human being was in sight. Next she put on her bonnet with the pretence of shopping, to see if there were any suspicious-looking persons in the street. But she did not meet a single person unknown to her between her aunt's door and Mr. Drew the linen-draper's. There she bought a pair of gloves, and walked quietly back, passing the house, and going on to the Abbey, without meeting one person at whom she had to look twice.

All the time her consciousness was like a single intense point of light in the middle of a darkness it could do nothing to illuminate. She knew nothing but that her brother lay in that horrible empty house, and that, if his words were not the ravings of a maniac, the law, whether it yet suspected him or not, was certainly after him, and if it had not yet struck upon his trail, was every moment on the point of finding it, and must sooner or later come up with him. She *must* save him—all that was left of him to save ! But poor Helen knew very little about saving.

One thing more she became suddenly aware of as she re-entered the house—the possession of a power of dissimulation, of hiding herself, hitherto strange to her, for hitherto she had nothing, hardly even a passing dislike, to conceal. The consciousness brought only exultation with it, for her nature was not yet delicate enough to feel the jar of the thought that neither words nor looks must any more be an index to what lay within her.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DAYLIGHT VISIT.

BUT she could not rest. When would the weary day be over, and the longed-for rather than welcome night appear? Again she went into the garden, and down to the end of it, and looked out over the meadow. Not a creature was in sight except a red and white cow, a child gathering buttercups, and a few rooks crossing from one field to another. It was a glorious day; the sun seemed the very centre of conscious peace. And now first, strange to say, Helen began to know the bliss of bare existence under a divine sky, in the midst of a divine air, the two making a divine summer, which throbbed with the presence of the creative spirit—but as something apart from her now, something she had had but had lost, which could never more be hers. How could she ever be glad again, with such a frightful fact in her soul! Away there beyond those trees lay her unhappy brother in the lonely house, now haunted indeed. Perhaps he lay there dead! The horrors of the morning or his own hand might have slain him. She must go to him. She would defy the very sun, and go in the face of the universe. Was he not her brother?—Was there no help anywhere? no mantle for this sense of soul-nakedness that had made her feel as if her awful secret might be read a mile away, lying crimson and livid in the bottom of her

heart? She dared hardly think of it, lest the very act should betray the thing of darkness to the world of light around her. Nothing but the atmosphere of another innocent soul could shield hers, and she had no friend. What did people do when their brothers did awful deeds? She had heard of praying to God—had indeed herself told her brother to pray, but it was all folly—worse, priestcraft. As if such things *and* a God could exist together! Yet, even with the thought of denial in her mind, she looked up, and gazed earnestly into the wide, innocent, mighty space, as if by searching she might find some one. Perhaps she *ought* to pray. She could see no likelihood of a God, and yet something pushed her towards prayer. What if all this had come upon her and Poldie because she never prayed! If there were such horrible things in the world, although she had never dreamed of them—if they could come so near her, into her very soul, making her feel like a murderess, might there not be a God also, though she knew nothing of his whereabouts or how to reach him and gain a hearing? Certainly if things went with such hellish possibilities at the heart of them, and there was no hand at all to restrain or guide or restore, the world was a good deal worse place than either the methodists or the positivists made it out to be. In the form of feelings, not of words, hardly even of thoughts, things like these passed through her mind as she stood on the top of the sunk fence and gazed across the flat of sunny green before her. She could almost have slain herself to be rid of her knowledge and the awful consciousness that was its result. *She* would have found no difficulty in that line of Macbeth, "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself."—But all this time there was her brother! She *must* go to him. "God hide me!" she cried within her. "But how can he hide me," she thought, "when I am hiding a murderer?" "O God!" she cried again, and this time in an audible murmur, "I am his sister, thou knowest!" Then she turned, walked back to the house, and sought her aunt.

"I have got a little headache," she said, quite coolly, "and

I want a long walk. Don't wait luncheon for me. It is such a glorious day! I shall go by the Millpool road, and across the park. Good-bye till tea, or perhaps dinner-time even."

"Hadn't you better have a ride and be back to luncheon? I shan't want Jones to-day," said her aunt mournfully, who, although she had almost given up birthdays, thought her niece need not quite desert her on the disagreeable occasion.

"I'm not in the humour for riding, aunt. Nothing will do me good but a walk. I shall put some luncheon in my bag."

She went quietly out by the front door, walked slowly, softly, statelily along the street and out of the town, and entered the park by the lodge-gate. She saw Rachel at her work in the kitchen as she passed, and heard her singing in a low and weak but very sweet voice, which went to her heart like a sting, making the tall, handsome, rich lady envy the poor distorted atom who, through all the fogs of her winter, had yet something in her that sought such utterance. But, indeed, if all her misery had been swept away like a dream, Helen might yet have envied the dwarf ten times more than she did now, had she but known how they stood compared with each other. For the being of Helen to that of Rachel was as a single, untwinned primary cell to a finished brain; as the peeping of a chicken to the song of a lark—I had almost said, to a sonata of Beethoven.

"Good-day, Rachel," she said, calling as she passed, in a kindly, even then rather condescending voice, through the open door, where a pail of water, just set down, stood rocking the sun on its heaving surface, and flashing it out again into the ocean of the light. It seemed to poor Helen a squalid abode, but it was a home-like palace, and fairly furnished in comparison with the suburban villa and shop-upholstery which typified the house of her spirit—now haunted by a terrible secret walking through its rooms, and laying a bloody hand upon all their whitenesses.

There was no sound all the way as she went but the noise of the birds and an occasional clank from the new building far away. At last, with beating heart and scared soul, she was within the high garden-wall, making her way through the rank growth of weeds and bushes to the dismal house. She entered trembling, and the air felt as if death had been before her. Hardly would her limbs carry her, but with slow step she reached the hidden room. He lay as she had left him. Was he asleep, or dead? She crept near and laid her hand on his forehead. He started to his feet in an agony of fright. She soothed and reassured him as best she was able. When the paroxysm relaxed,

"You didn't whistle," he said.

"No; I forgot," answered Helen, shocked at her own carelessness. "But if I had, you would not have heard me: you were fast asleep."

"A good thing I was! And yet no! I wish I had heard you, for then by this time I should have been beyond their reach."

Impulsively he showed her the short, dangerous-looking weapon he carried. Helen stretched out her hand to take it, but he hurriedly replaced it in his pocket.

"I will find some water for you to wash with," said Helen. "There used to be a well in the garden, I remember. I have brought you a shirt."

With some difficulty she found the well, all but lost in matted weeds under an ivy-tod, and in the saucer of a flower-pot she carried him some water, and put the garment with the horrible spot in her bag, to take it away and destroy it. Then she made him eat and drink. He did whatever she told him, with a dull yet doglike obedience. His condition was much changed; he had a stupefied look, and seemed only half awake to his terrible situation. Yet he answered what questions she put to him even too readily—with an indifferent matter-of-factness, indeed, more dreadful than any most passionate outburst. But at the root of the apparent apathy lay despair and remorse—weary, like gorged and sleeping tigers far back in their dens. Only the dull torpedo

of misery was awake, lying motionless on the bottom of the deepest pool of his spirit.

The mood was favourable to the drawing of his story from him, but there are more particulars in the narrative I am now going to give than Helen at that time learned.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LEOPOLD'S STORY.

WHILE yet a mere boy, scarcely more than sixteen, Leopold had made acquaintance with the family of a certain manufacturer, who, having retired from business with a rapidly gained fortune, had some years before purchased an estate a few miles from Goldswyre, his uncle's place. Their settling in the neighbourhood was not welcome to the old-fashioned, long-rooted family of the Lingards; but although they had not called upon them, they could not help meeting them occasionally. Leopold's association with them commenced just after he had left Eton, between which time and his going up to Cambridge he spent a year in reading with his cousins' tutor. It was at a ball he first saw Emmeline, the eldest of the family. She had but lately returned from a school at which from the first she had had for her bedfellow a black ewe. It was not a place where any blackness under that of pitch was likely to attract notice, being one of those very ordinary and very common schools where everything is done that is done, first for manners, then for accomplishments, and lastly for information, leaving all the higher faculties and endowments of the human being as entirely unconsidered as if they had no existence. Taste, feeling, judgment, imagination, conscience, are in such places left to look after themselves, and

the considerations presented to them and duties required of them as religious, are only fitted to lower still further such moral standard as they may possess. Schools of this kind send out, as their quota of the supply of mothers for the ages to come, young women who will consult a book of etiquette as to what is lady-like ; who always think what is the mode, never what is beautiful ; who read romances in which the wickedness is equalled only by the shallowness ; who write questions to weekly papers concerning points of behaviour ; and place their whole or chief delight in making themselves attractive to men. Some such girls look lady-like and interesting, and many of them are skilled in the arts that meet their fullest development in a nature whose sense of existence is rounded by its own reflection in the mirror of a self-consciousness falsified by vanity. Once understood, they are for a sadness or a loathing, after the nature that understands them ; till then, they are to the beholder such as they desire to appear, while under the fair outside lies a nature whose vulgarity, if the most thorough of changes do not in the meantime supervene, will manifest itself hideously on the approach of middle age, that is, by the time when habituation shall have destroyed the restraints of diffidence. Receiving ever fresh and best assurance of their own consequence in the attention and admiration of men, such girls are seldom capable of any real attachment, and the marvel is that so few of them comparatively disgrace themselves after marriage.

Whether it was the swarthy side of his nature, early ripened under the hot Indian sun, that found itself irresistibly drawn to the widening of its humanity in the flaxen fairness of Emmeline, or the Saxon element in him seeking back to its family—it might indeed have been both, our nature admitting of such marvellous complexity in its unity —he fell in love with her, if not in the noblest yet in a very genuine though at the same time very passionate way ; and as she had, to use a Scots Proverb, a crop for all corn, his attentions were acceptable to her. Had she been true-hearted enough to know anything of that love whose name

was for ever suffering profanation upon her lips, she would, being at least a year and a half older than he, have been too much of a woman to encourage his approaches—would have felt he was a boy and must not be allowed to fancy himself a man. But to be just, he did look to English eyes older than he was. And then he was very handsome, distinguished-looking, of a good family, which could in no sense be said of her, and with high connections—at the same time a natural contrast to herself, and personally attractive to her. The first moment she saw his great black eyes blaze, she accepted the homage, laid it on the altar of her self-worship, and ever after sought to see them lighted up afresh in worship of her only divinity. To be feelingly aware of her power over him, to play upon him as on an instrument, to make his cheek pale or glow, his eyes flash or fill as she pleased, was a game almost too delightful.

One of the most potent means for producing the humano-atmospheric play in which her soul thus rejoiced, and one whose operation was to none better known than to Emmeline, was jealousy, and for its generation she had all possible facilities, for there could not be a woman in regard of whom jealousy was more justifiable on any ground except that of being worth it. So far as it will reach, however, it must be remembered, in mitigation of judgment, that she had no gauge in herself equal to the representation of a tithe of the misery whose signs served to lift her to the very Paradise of falsehood: she knew not what she did, and possibly knowledge might have found in her some pity and abstinence. But when a woman, in her own nature cold, takes delight in rousing passion, she will, selfishly confident in her own safety, go to strange lengths in kindling and fanning the flame which is the death of the other.

It is far from my intention to follow the disagreeable topic across the pathless swamp through which an elaboration of its phases would necessarily drag me. Of morbid anatomy, save for the setting forth of cure, I am not fond, and here there is nothing to be said of cure. What concerns me as a narrator is, that Emmeline consoled and irritated and re-

consoled Leopold, until she had him her very slave, and the more her slave that by that time he knew something of her character. The knowledge took from him what little repose she had left him; he did no more good at school, and went to Cambridge with the conviction that the woman to whom he had given his soul would be doing things in his absence the sight of which would drive him mad. Yet somehow he continued to live, reassured now and then by the loving letters she wrote to him, and relieving his own heart while he fostered her falsehood by the passionate replies he made to them.

From a sad accident of his childhood, he had become acquainted with something of the influences of a certain baneful drug, to the use of which one of his attendants was addicted, and now at college, partly from curiosity, partly from a desire to undergo its effects, but chiefly in order to escape from ever gnawing and passionate thought, he began to make *experiments* in its use. Experiment called for repetition—in order to verification, said the fiend—and repetition led first to a longing after its effects, and next to a mad appetite for the thing itself; so that by the time of which my narrative treats he was on the verge of absolute slavery to its use, and in imminent peril of having to pass the rest of his life in alternations of ecstasy and agony, divided by dull spaces of misery, the ecstasies growing rarer and rarer, and the agonies more and more frequent, intense, and lasting; until at length the dethroned Apollo found himself chained to a pillar of his own ruined temple, which the sirocco was fast filling with desert sand.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LEOPOLD'S STORY CONCLUDED.

HE knew from her letters that they were going to give a ball, at which as many as pleased should be welcome in fancy dresses, and masked if they chose. The night before it he had a dream, under the influence of his familiar no doubt, which made him so miserable and jealous that he longed to see her as a wounded man longs for water, and the thought arose of going down to the ball, not exactly in disguise, for he had no mind to act a part, but masked so that he should not be recognised as uninvited, and should have an opportunity of watching Emmeline, concerning whose engagement with a young cavalry officer there had lately been reports, which, however, before his dream, had caused him less uneasiness than many such preceding. The same moment the thought was a resolve.

I must mention that no one whatever knew the degree of his intimacy with Emmeline, or that he had any ground for considering her engaged to him. Secrecy added much to the zest of Emmeline's pleasures. Every one knew that he was a devoted admirer—but therein to be classed with a host.

For concealment he contented himself with a large travelling cloak, a tall felt hat, and a black silk mask.

He entered the grounds with an arrival of guests, and, knowing the place perfectly, contrived to see something of her

behaviour while he watched for an opportunity of speaking to her alone—a quest of unlikely success. Hour after hour he watched, and all the time never spoke or was spoken to.

Those who are acquainted with the mode of operation of the drug to which I have referred, are aware that a man may be fully under its influences without betraying to the ordinary observer that he is in a condition differing from that of other men. But, in the living dream wherein he walks, his feeling of time and of space is so enlarged, or perhaps, I rather think, so subdivided to the consciousness, that everything about him seems infinite both in duration and extent; the action of a second has in it a multitudinous gradation of progress, and a line of space is marked out into millionths, of every one of which the consciousness takes note. At the same time his senses are open to every impression from things around him, only they appear to him in a strangely exalted metamorphosis, the reflex of his own mental exaltation either in bliss or torture, while the fancies of the man mingle with the facts thus introduced and modify and are in turn modified by them; whereby out of the chaos arises the mountain of an Earthly Paradise, whose roots are in the depths of hell; and whether the man be with the divine air and the clear rivers and the thousand-hued flowers on the top, or down in the ice-lake with the tears frozen to hard lumps in the hollows of his eyes so that he can no more have even the poor consolation of weeping, is but the turning of a hair, so far at least as his will has to do with it. The least intrusion of anything painful, of any jar that cannot be wrought into the general harmony of the vision, will suddenly alter its character, and from the seventh heaven of speechless bliss the man may fall plumb down into gulfs of horrible and torturing, it may be loathsome imaginings.

Now Leopold had taken a dose of the drug on his journey, and it was later than usual, probably because of the motion, ere it began to take effect. He had indeed ceased to look for any result from it, when all at once, as he stood among the laburnums and lilacs of a rather late spring, something seemed to burst in his brain, and that moment he was

Endymion waiting for Diana in her interlunar grove, while the music of the spheres made the blossoms of a stately yet flowering forest tremble all with conscious delight.

Emboldened by his new condition, he drew nigh the house. They were then passing from the ball to the supper room, and he found the tumult so distasteful to his mood of still ecstasy that he would not have entered had he not remembered that he had in his pocket a note ready if needful to slip into her hand, containing only the words, "Meet me for one long minute at the circle"—a spot well known to both. He threw his cloak Spanish fashion over his left shoulder, slouched his hat, and entering, stood in a shadowy spot she must pass in going to or from the supper room. There he waited, with the note hid in his hand, a long time, yet not a weary one, such visions of loveliness passed before his entranced gaze. At length *she* also passed, lovely as the Diana whose dress she had copied—not quite so perfectly as she had abjured her manners. She leaned trustingly on the arm of some one, but Leopold never even looked at him. He slid the note into her hand, which hung ungloved as inviting confidences. With an instinct quickened and sharpened tenfold by much practice, her fingers instantly closed upon it, but not a muscle belonging to any other part of her betrayed the intrusion of a foreign body: I do not believe her heart gave one beat the more to the next minute. She passed gracefully on, her swan's-neck shining; and Leopold hastened out to one of the windows of the ball-room, there to feast his eyes upon her loveliness. But when he caught sight of her whirling in the waltz with the officer of dragoons whose name he had heard coupled with hers, and saw her flash on him the light and power of eyes which were to him the windows of all the heaven he knew, as they swam together in the joy of the rhythm, of the motion, of the music, suddenly the whole frame of the dream wherein he wandered trembled, shook, fell down into the dreary vaults that underlie all the airy castles that have other foundation than the will of the eternal Builder. With the suddenness of the dark that follows the lightning, the music changed to

a dissonant clash of multitudinous cymbals, the resounding clang of brazen doors, and the hundred-toned screams of souls in torture. The same moment, from halls of infinite scope, where the very air was a soft tumult of veiled melodies ever and anon twisted into inextricable knots of harmony—under whose skyey domes he swept upborne by chords of sound throbbing up against great wings mighty as thought, yet in their motions as easy and subtle, he found himself lying on the floor of a huge vault, whose black slabs were worn into many hollows by the bare feet of the damned as they went and came between the chambers of their torture opening off upon every side, whence issued all kinds of sickening cries, and mingled with the music to which, with whips of steel, hellish executioners urged the dance whose every motion was an agony. His soul fainted within him, and the vision changed. When he came to himself, he lay on the little plot of grass among the lilacs and laburnums where he had asked Emmeline to meet him. Fevered with jealousy and the horrible drug, his mouth was parched like an old purse, and he found himself chewing at the grass to ease its burning and drought. But presently the evil thing resumed its sway, and fancies usurped over facts. He was lying in an Indian jungle, close by the cave of a beautiful tigress, which crouched within, waiting only the first sting of reviving hunger to devour him. He could hear her breathing as she slept, but he was fascinated, paralysed, and could not escape, knowing that, even if with mighty effort he succeeded in moving a finger, that motion would suffice to wake her, and she would spring upon him and tear him to pieces. Years upon years passed thus, and still he lay on the grass in the jungle, and still the beautiful tigress slept. But however far apart the knots upon the string of time may lie, they must pass : an angel in white stood over him ; his fears vanished ; the waving of her wings cooled him ; and she was the angel whom he had loved, and loved from all eternity, in whom was his ever-and-only rest. She lifted him to his feet, she gave him her hand : they walked away, and the tigress was asleep for ever. For miles and miles, as it seemed

to his exaltation, they wandered away into the woods, to wander in them for ever, the same violet blue, flashing with roseate stars, for ever looking in through the tree-tops, and the great leafy branches hushing, ever hushing them, as with the voices of child-watching mothers, into peace, whose depth is bliss.

"Have you nothing to say now I am come?" said the angel.

"I have said all. I am at rest," answered the mortal.

"I am going to be married to Captain Hodges," said the angel.

And with the word, the forest of heaven vanished, and the halls of Eblis did not take their place: a worse hell was there—the cold reality of an earth abjured, and a worthless maiden walking by his side. He stood and turned to her. The shock had mastered the drug. They were only in the little wooded hollow, a hundred yards from the house. The blood throbbed in his head as from the piston of an engine. A horrid sound of dance-music was in his ears. Emmeline, his own, stood in her white dress, looking up in his face, with the words just parted from her lips, "I am going to be married to Captain Hodges." The next moment she threw her arms round his neck, pulled his face to hers, and kissed him and clung to him.

"Poor Leopold!" she said, and looked in his face with her electric battery at full power; "does it make him miserable, then? But you know it could not have gone on like this between you and me for ever! It was very dear while it lasted, but it must come to an end."

Was there a glimmer of real pity and sadness in those wondrous eyes? She laughed—was it a laugh of despair or of exultation?—and hid her face on his bosom. And what was it that awoke in Leopold? Had the drug resumed its power over him? Was it rage at her mockery, or infinite compassion for her despair? Would he slay a demon, or ransom a spirit from hateful bonds? Would he save a woman from disgrace and misery to come? or punish her for the vilest falsehood? Who can tell? for Leopold him-

self never could. Whatever the feeling was, its own violence erased it from his memory, and left him with a knife in his hand and Emmeline lying motionless at his feet. It was a knife the Scotch highlanders call a *skean-dhu*, sharp-pointed as a needle, sharp-edged as a razor, and with one blow of it he had cleft her heart, and she never cried or laughed any more in that body whose charms she had degraded to the vile servitude of her vanity. The next thing he remembered was standing on the edge of the shaft of a deserted coalpit, ready to cast himself down. Whence came the change of resolve he could not tell, but he threw in his cloak and mask, and fled. The one thought in his miserable brain was his sister. Having murdered one woman, he was fleeing to another for refuge. Helen would save him.

How he had found his way to his haven he had not an idea. Searching the newspapers, Helen learned that a week had elapsed between the "mysterious murder of a young lady in Yorkshire" and the night on which he came to her window.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SISTERHOOD.

"WELL, Poldie, after all I would rather be you than she!" cried Helen indignantly, when she had learned the whole story.

It was far from the wisest thing to say, but she meant it, and clasped her brother to her bosom. Straightway the poor fellow began to search for all that man could utter in excuse, nay in justification, not of himself but of the woman he had murdered, appropriating all the blame. But Helen had recognised in Emmeline the selfishness which is the essential murderer, nor did it render her more lenient towards her that the same moment, with a start of horror, she caught a transient glimpse of the same in herself. But the discovery wrought in the other direction, and the tenderness she now lavished upon Leopold left all his hopes far behind. Her brother's sin had broken wide the feebly flowing springs of her conscience, and she saw that in idleness and ease and drowsiness of soul she had been forgetting and neglecting even the being she loved best in the universe. In the rushing confluence of love, truth, and indignation, to atone for years of half-love, half-indifference as the past now appeared to her, she would have spoiled him, terribly, heaping on him caresses, and assurances that he was far the less guilty and the more injured of the two; but Leopold's strength was exhausted, and he fell back in a faint.

While she was occupied with his restoration, many things passed through her mind. Among the rest she saw it would be impossible for her to look after him sufficiently where he was, that the difficulty of feeding him even would be great, that very likely he was on the borders of an illness, when he would require constant attention, that the danger of discovery was great—in short, that some better measures must be taken for his protection and the possibility of her ministrations. If she had but a friend to consult! Ever that thought returned. Alas! she had none on whose counsel, or discretion either, she could depend! When at length he opened his eyes, she told him she must leave him now, but when it was dark she would come again, and stay with him till dawn. Feebly he assented, seeming but half aware of what she said, and again closed his eyes. While he lay thus she gained possession of his knife. It left its sheath behind it, and she put it naked in her pocket. As she went from the room, feeling like a mother abandoning her child in a wolf-haunted forest, his eyes followed her to the door with a longing, wild, hungry look, and she felt the look following her still through the wood and across the park and into her chamber, while the knife in her pocket felt like a spell-bound demon waiting his chance to work them both a mischief. She locked her door and took it out, and as she put it carefelly away, fearful lest any attempt to destroy it might but lead to its discovery, she caught sight of her brother's name engraved in full upon the silver mounting of the handle. "What if he had left it behind him!" she thought with a shudder.

But a reassuring strength had risen in her mind with Leopold's disclosure. More than once on her way home she caught herself reasoning that the poor boy had not been to blame at all; that he could not help it; that she had deserved nothing less. Her conscience speedily told her that in consenting to such athought she herself would be a murderess. Love her brother she must; excuse him she might, for honest excuse is only justice; but to uphold the deed would be to take the part of hell against heaven. Still the murder did

not, would not seem so frightful after she had heard the whole tale, and she found it now required far less effort to face her aunt. If she was not the protectress of the innocent, she was of the grievously wronged, and the worst wrong done him was the crime he had been driven to do. She lay down and slept until dinner-time, woke refreshed, and sustained her part during the slow meal, heartened by the expectation of seeing her brother again, and in circumstances of less anxiety, when the friendly darkness had come and all eyes but theirs were closed. She talked to her aunt and a lady who dined with them as if she had the freest heart in the world ; the time passed ; the converse waned ; the hour arrived ; adieus were said ; drowsiness came. All the world of Glaston was asleep ; the night on her nest was brooding upon the egg of to-morrow ; the moon was in darkness ; and the wind was blowing upon Helen's hot forehead as she slid like a thief across the park.

Her mind was in a tumult of mingled feelings, all gathered about the form of her precious brother. One moment she felt herself ministering to the father she had loved so dearly, in protecting his son ; the next, the thought of her father had vanished, and all was love for the boy whose memories filled the shadow of her childhood ; about whom she had dreamed night after night as he crossed the great sea to come to her ; who had crept into her arms timidly, and straightway turned into the daintiest, merriest playmate ; who had charmed her even in his hot-blooded rages, when he rushed at her with whatever was in his hand at the moment. Then she had laughed and dared him, now she shuddered to remember. Again—and this was the feeling that generally prevailed—she was a vessel overflowing with the mere woman-passion of protection : the wronged, abused, maddened, oppressed, hunted, human thing was dependent upon her, and her alone, for any help or safety he was ever to find. Sometimes it was the love of a mother for her sick child ; sometimes that of a tigress crouching over her wounded cub and licking its hurts. All was coloured with admiration of his beauty and grace, and mingled with boundless pity for their sad overclouding and

defeature! Nor was the sense of wrong to herself in wrong to her own flesh and blood wanting. The sum of all was a passionate devotion of her being to the service of her brother.

I suspect that at root the loves of the noble wife, the great-souled mother, and the true sister, are one. Anyhow, they are all but glints on the ruffled waters of humanity of the one changeless enduring Light.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SICK CHAMBER.

SHE had reached the little iron gate, which hung on one hinge only, and was lifting it from the ground to push it open, when sudden through the stillness came a frightful cry. Had they found him already? Was it a life-and-death struggle going on within? For one moment she stood rooted; the next she flew to the door. When she entered the hall, however, the place was silent as a crypt. Could it have been her imagination? Again, curdling her blood with horror, came the tearing cry, a sort of shout of agony. All in the dark she flew up the stair, calling him by name, fell twice, rose as if on wings, and flew again until she reached the room. There all was silence and darkness. With trembling hands she found her match-box and struck a light, uttering all the time every soothing word she could think of, while her heart quavered in momentary terror of another shriek. It came just as the match flamed up in her fingers, and an answering shriek from her bosom tore its way through her clenched teeth, and she shuddered like one in an ague. There sat her brother on the edge of the bedstead, staring before him with fixed eyes and terror-stricken countenance. He had not heard her enter, and saw neither the light nor her who held it. She made haste to light the candle, with mighty effort talking to him still, in gasps and chokings, but in vain:

the ghastly face continued unchanged, and the wide-open eyes remained fixed. She seated herself at his side and threw her arms around him. It was like embracing a marble statue, so moveless, so irresponsive was he. But presently he gave a kind of shudder, the tension of his frame relaxed, and the soul which had been absorbed in its own visions came forward to its windows, cast from them a fleeting glance, then dropped the curtains.

"Is it you, Helen?" he said, shuddering, as he closed his eyes and laid his head on her shoulder. His breath was like that of a furnace. His skin seemed on fire. She felt his pulse: it was galloping. He was in a fever—brain-fever probably—and what was she to do? A thought came to her. Yes, it was the only possible thing. She would take him home. There, with the help of the household, she might have a chance of concealing him—a poor one, certainly; but here, how was she even to keep him to the house in his raving fits?

"Poldie, dear!" she said, "you must come with me. I am going to take you to my own room, where I can nurse you properly and need not leave you. Do you think you could walk as far?"

"Walk! Yes; quite well: why not?"

"I am afraid you are going to be ill, Poldie; but, however ill you may feel, you must promise me to try to make as little noise as you can, and never cry out if you can help it. When I do like this," she went on, laying her finger on his lips, "you must be silent altogether."

"I will do whatever you tell me, Helen, if you will only promise not to leave me, and, when they come for me, to give me poison."

She promised, and made haste to obliterate every sign that the room had been occupied. She then took his arm and led him out. He was very quiet—too quiet and submissive, she thought—seemed sleepy, revived a little when they reached the open air, presently grew terrified, and kept starting and looking about him as they crossed the park, but never spoke a word. By the door in the sunk fence they

reached the garden, and were soon in Helen's chamber, where she left him to get into bed while she went to acquaint her aunt of his presence in the house. Hard and unreasonable, like most human beings, where her predjuices were concerned, she had, like all other women, sympathy with those kinds of suffering which by experience she understood. Mental distress was beyond her, but for the solace of another's pain she would even have endured a portion herself. When therefore she heard Helen's story, how her brother had come to her window, that he was ill with brain-fever as she thought, and talked wildly, she quite approved of her having put him to bed in her own room, and would have got up to help in nursing him. But Helen persuaded her to have her night's rest, and begged her to join with her in warning the servants not to mention his presence in the house, on the ground that it might get abroad that he was out of his mind. They were all old and tolerably faithful, and Leopold had been from childhood such a favourite that she hoped thus to secure their silence.

"But, child, he must have the doctor," said her aunt.

"Yes; but I will manage him. What a good thing old Mr. Bird is gone! He was such a gossip! We must call in the new doctor, Mr. Faber. I shall see that he understands. He has his practice to make, and will mind what I say."

"Why, child, you are as cunning as an old witch!" said her aunt. "—It is very awkward," she went on. "What miserable creatures men are—from first to last! Out of one scrape into another from babies to old men! Would you believe it, my dear?—your uncle, one of the best of men and most exemplary of clergymen—why, I had to put on his stockings for him every day he got up! Not that my services stopped there either, I can tell you! Latterly I wrote more than half his sermons for him. He never would preach the same sermon twice, you see. He made that a point of honour; and the consequence was that at last he had to come to me. His sermons were nothing the losers, I trust, or our congregation either. I used the same

commentaries he did, and you would hardly believe how much I enjoyed the work.—Poor dear boy! we must do what we can for him."

"I will call you if I find it necessary, aunt. I must go to him now, for he cannot bear me out of his sight. Don't, please, send for the doctor tlll I see you again."

When she got back to her room, to her great relief she found Leopold asleep. The comfort of the bed after his terrible exhaustion and the hardships he had undergone, had combined with the drug under whose influence he had more or less been ever since first he appeared at Helen's window, and he slept soundly.

But when he woke he was in a high fever, and Mr. Faber was summoned. He found the state of his patient such that no amount of wild utterance could have surprised him. His brain was burning and his mind all abroad; he tossed from side to side and talked vehemently, but even to Helen unintelligibly.

Mr. Faber had not attended medical classes and walked the hospitals without undergoing the influences of the unbelief prevailing in those regions, where, on the strength of a little knowledge of the human frame, cart-loads of puerile ignorance and anile vulgarity, not to mention obscenity, are uttered in the name of truth by men who know nothing whatever of the things that belong to the deeper nature believed in by the devout and simple, and professed also by many who are perhaps yet farther from a knowledge of its affairs than those who thus treat them with contempt. When, therefore, he came to practise in Glaston, he brought his quota of yeast into the old bottle of that ancient and slumberous town. But as he had to gain for himself a practice, he was prudent enough to make no display of the cherished emptiness of his swept and garnished rooms. I do not mean to blame him. He did not fancy himself the holder of any Mephistophelean commission for the general annihilation of belief like George Bascombe, only one from nature's bureau of ways and means for the cure of the ailing body—which indeed, to him, comprised all there was

of humanity. He had a cold, hard, business-like manner, which, however admirable on some grounds, destroyed any hope Helen had cherished of finding in him one to whom she might disclose her situation.

He proved himself both wise and skilful, yet it was weeks before Leopold began to mend. By the time the fever left him he was in such a prostrate condition that it was very doubtful whether yet he could live, and Helen had had to draw largely even upon her fine stock of health.

Her ministration continued most exhausting. Yet now she thought of her life as she had never thought of it before—namely, as a thing of worth. It had grown precious to her since it had become the stay of Leopold's. Notwithstanding the terrible state of suspense and horror in which she now lived, seeming to herself at times an actual sharer in her brother's guilt, she would yet occasionally find herself exulting in the thought of being the guardian angel he called her. Now that by his bedside hour plodded after hour in something of sameness and much of weariness, she yet looked back on her past as on the history of a slug.

During all the time she scarcely saw her cousin George, and indeed, she could hardly tell why, shrank from him. In the cold, bright, shadowless, north-windy day of his presence there was little consolation to be gathered, and for strength—to face him made a fresh demand upon the little she had. Her physical being had certainly lost. But the countenance which, after a long interval of absence, the curate at length one morning descried in the midst of the congregation, had, along with its pallor and look of hidden and suppressed trouble, gathered the expression of a higher order of existence. Not that she had drawn a single consoling draught from any one of the wells of religion, or now sought the church for the sake of any reminder of something found precious : the great quiet place drew her merely with the offer of its two hours' restful stillness. The thing which had elevated her was simply the fact that,

without any thought, not to say knowledge of him, she had yet been doing the will of the Heart of the world. True she had been but following her instinct, and ministering, not to humanity from an enlarged affection, but only to the one being she best loved in all the world—a small merit surely !—yet was it the beginning of the way of God, the lovely way, and therefore the face of the maiden had begun to shine with a light which no splendour of physical health, no consciousness of beauty, however just, could have kindled there.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CURATE'S PROGRESS.

THE visits of Wingfold to the little people at the gate not only became frequent, but more and more interesting to him, and as his office occasioned few demands on his attention, Polwarth had plenty of time to give to one who sought instruction in those things which were his very passion. He had never yet had any pupil but his niece, and to find another, and one whose soul was so eager after that of which he had such long-gathered store to dispense, was a keen, pure, and solemn delight. It was that for which he had so often prayed—an outlet for the living waters of his spirit into dry and thirsty lands. He had not much faculty for writing, although now and then he would relieve his heart in verse; and if he had a somewhat remarkable gift of discourse, to attempt public utterance would have been but a vain exposure of his person to vulgar mockery. In Wingfold he had found a man docile and obedient, both thirsting after and recognisant of the truth, and if he might but aid him in unsealing the well of truth in his own soul, the healing waters might from him flow far and near. Not as the little Zacchæus who pieced his own shortness with the length of the sycamore tree, so to rise above his taller brethren and see Jesus, little Polwarth would lift tall Wingfold on his shoulders, first to see, and then cry aloud to his brethren who was at hand.

For two or three Sundays the curate, largely assisted by his friend, fed his flock with his gleanings from other men's harvests, and already, though it had not yet come to his knowledge, one consequence was that complaints, running together, made a pool of discontent, and a semi-public meeting had been held, wherein was discussed, and not finally negatived, the propriety of communicating with the rector on the subject. Some, however, held that, as the incumbent paid so little attention to his flock, it would be better to appeal to the bishop, and acquaint him with the destitution of that portion of his oversight. But things presently took a new turn, at first surprising, soon alarming to some, and at length to not a few appalling.

Obedient to Polwarth's instructions, Wingfold had taken to his New Testament. At first, as he read and sought to understand, ever and anon some small difficulty, notably, foremost of all, the discrepancy in the genealogies—I mention it merely to show the sort of difficulty I mean—would insect-like shoot out of the darkness and sting him in the face. Some of these he pursued, encountered, crushed—and found he had gained next to nothing by the victory; and Polwarth soon persuaded him to let such alone for the present, seeing they involved nothing concerning the man at a knowledge of whom it was his business to arrive. But when it came to the perplexity caused by some of the sayings of Jesus himself, it was another matter. He *must* understand these, he thought, or fail to understand the man. Here Polwarth told him that, if, after all, he seemed to fail, he must conclude that possibly the meaning of the words was beyond him, and that the understanding of them depended on a more advanced knowledge of Jesus himself; for, while words reveal the speaker, they must yet lie in the light of something already known of the speaker to be themselves intelligible. Between the mind and the understanding of certain hard utterances, therefore, there must of necessity lie a gradation of easier steps. And here Polwarth was tempted to give him a far more important, because more immediately practical hint, but refrained, from the dread of

weakening by *presentation*, the force of a truth which, in *discovery*, would have its full effect. For he was confident that the curate, in the temper which was now his, must ere long come immediately upon the truth towards which he was tempted to point him.

On one occasion when Wingfold had asked him whether he saw the meaning of a certain saying of our Lord, Polwarth answered thus:

"I think I do; but whether I could at present make you see it I cannot tell. I suspect it is one of those concerning which I have already said that you have yet to understand Jesus better before you can understand them. Let me, just to make the nature of what I state clear to you, ask you one question: tell me, if you can, what, primarily, did Jesus, from his own account of himself, come into the world to do?"

"To save it," answered Wingfold.

"I think you are wrong," returned Polwarth. "Mind, I said *primarily*. You will yourself come to the same conclusion by and by. Either our Lord was a phantom—a heresy of potent working in the minds of many who would be fierce in its repudiation—or he was a very man, uttering the heart of his life that it might become the life of his brethren; and if so, an honest man can never ultimately fail of getting at what he means. I have seen him described somewhere as a man dominated by the passion of humanity—or something like that. The description does not, to my mind, even shadow the truth. Another passion, if such I may dare to call it, was the light of his life, dominating even that which would yet have been enough to make him lay down his life."

Wingfold went away pondering.

Though Polwarth read little concerning religion except the New Testament, he could yet have directed Wingfold to several books which might have lent him good aid in his quest after the real likeness of the man he sought; but he greatly desired that on the soul of his friend the dawn should break over the mountains of Judæa—the first light, I mean, flow from the words themselves of the Son of Man. Some-

times he grew so excited about his pupil and his progress, and looked so anxiously for the news of light in his darkness, that he could not rest at home but would be out all day in the park—praying, his niece believed, for the young parson. And little did Wingfold suspect that, now and again when his lamp was burning far into the night because he struggled with some hard saying, the little man was going round and round the house like one muttering charms, only they were prayers for his friend. Ill satisfied with his own feeble affection, he would supplement it with its origin, would lay hold upon the riches of the Godhead, crying for his friend to "the first stock-father of gentleness;"—folly all, and fair subject of laughter to such as George Bascombe, if there be no God; but as Polwarth, with his whole, healthy, holy soul, believed there is a God, it was for him but simple common-sense.

Still no daybreak; and now the miracles had grown troublesome! Could Mr. Polwarth honestly say that he found no difficulty in believing things so altogether out of the common order of events, and so buried in the darkness and dust of antiquity that investigation was impossible?

Mr. Polwarth could not say that he had found no such difficulty.

"Then why should the weight of the story," said Wingfold, "the weight of its proof, I mean, to minds like ours, coming so long after, and by their education incapacitated for believing in such things, in a time when the law of everything is searched into—"

"And as yet very likely as far from understood as ever," interposed but not interrupted Polwarth.

"—why should the weight of its proof, I ask, be laid upon such improbable things as miracles? That they are necessarily improbable, I presume you will admit."

"Having premised that I believed every one recorded," said Polwarth, "I heartily admit their improbability. But the *weight* of proof is not, and never was, laid upon them. Our Lord did not make much of them, and did them far more for the individual concerned than for the sake of the beholders. I will not, however, talk to you about them now.

I will merely say that it is not through the miracles you will find the Lord, though having found him, you will find him there also. The question for you is not, Are the miracles true? but, Was Jesus true? Again I say, you must find him, the man himself. When you have found him, I may perhaps retort upon you the question, 'Can you believe such improbable things as the miracles, Mr. Wingfold?'"

The little man showed pretty plainly by the set of his lips that he meant to say no more, and again Wingfold had, with considerable dissatisfaction and no answer, to go back to his New Testament.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CURATE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

AT length, one day, as he was working with a harmony, comparing certain passages between themselves, and as variedly given in the gospels, he fell into a half-thinking, half-dreaming mood, in which his eyes, for some time unconsciously, rested on the verse, 'Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.' It mingled itself with his brooding, and by and by, though yet he was brooding rather than meditating, the form of Jesus had gathered, in the stillness of his mental quiescence, so much of reality that at length he found himself thinking of him as of a true-hearted man, mightily in earnest to help his fellows, who could not get them to mind what he told them.

"Ah!" said the curate to himself, "if I had but seen him, would not I have minded him! would not I have haunted his steps, with question upon question, until I got at the truth!"

Again the more definite thought vanished in the seething chaos of reverie, which dured unbroken for a time, until again suddenly rose from memory to consciousness and attention the words, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "here am I bothering over words, and questioning about this and that, as if I were test-

ing his fitness for a post I had to offer him, and he all the time claiming my obedience! I cannot even, on the spur of the moment at least, tell one thing he wants me to do; and as to doing anything because he told me—not once did I ever! But then how am I to obey him until I am sure of his right to command? I just want to know whether I am to call him Lord or not. No, that won't do either, for he says, Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? And do I not know—have I ever even doubted that what he said we ought to do, was the right thing to do? Yet here have I, all these years, been calling myself a Christian, ministering, forsooth, in the temple of Christ, as if he were a heathen divinity, who cared for songs and prayers and sacrifices, and cannot honestly say I ever once in my life did a thing because he said so, although the record is full of his earnest, even pleading words! I have *not* been an honest man, and how should a dishonest man be a judge over that man who said he was the Christ of God? Would it be any wonder if the things he uttered should be too high and noble to be by such a man recognised as truth?

With this, yet another saying dawned upon him: *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

He went into his closet and shut to the door: came out again, and went straight to visit a certain grievous old woman.

The next open result was, that, on the following Sunday, a man went up into the pulpit who, for the first time in his life, believed he had something to say to his fellow-sinners. It was not now the sacred spoil of the best of gleaning or catering that he bore thither with him, but the message given him by a light in his own inward parts, discovering therein the darkness and the wrong.

He opened no sermon case, nor read words from any book, save, with trembling voice, these:

"*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*"

I pause for a moment in my narrative to request the

sympathy of such readers as may be capable of affording it, for a man whose honesty makes him appear egotistic. When a man, finding himself in a false position, is yet anxious to do the duties of that position until such time as, if he should not in the meantime have verified it and become able to fill it with honesty, he may honourably leave it, I think he may well be pardoned if, of inward necessity, he should refer to himself in a place where such reference may be either the greatest impiety or the outcome of the truest devotion. In him it was neither: it was honesty—and absorption in the startled gaze of a love that believed it had caught a glimmer of the passing garment of the Truth. Thus strengthened—might I not say inspired? for what is the love of truth and the joy therein, if not a breathing into the soul of the breath of life from the God of truth?—he looked round upon his congregation as he had never dared until now; saw face after face, and knew it; saw among the rest that of Helen Lingard, so sadly yet not pitifully altered, with a doubt if it could be she; trembled a little with a new excitement, which one less modest or less wise might have taken—how foolishly!—instead of the truth perceived, for the inspiration of the spirit; and, sternly suppressing the emotion, said,

"My hearers, I come before you this morning to utter the first word of truth it has ever been given to *me* to utter."

His hearers stared both mentally and corporeally.

"Is he going to deny the Bible?" said some. "It will be the last," said others, "if the rector hear in time how you have been disgracing yourself and profaning his pulpit."

"And," the curate went on, "it would be as a fire in my bones did I attempt to keep it back.

"In my room, three days ago, I was reading the strange story of the man who appeared in Palestine saying that he was the Son of God, and came upon those words of his which I have now read in your hearing. At their sound the accuser, Conscience, awoke in my bosom, and asked, 'Doest thou the things he saith to thee?' And I thought with myself, 'Have I this day done anything he says to me?

When did I do anything I had heard of him? Did I ever'—to this it came at last—'Did I ever, in all my life, do one thing because he said to me, *Do this?*' And the answer was *No, never.* Yet there I was, not only calling myself a Christian, but on the strength of my Christianity, it was to be presumed, living among you, and received by you, as your helper on the way to the heavenly kingdom—a living falsehood, walking and talking among you!"

"What a wretch!" said one man to himself, who made a large part of his living by the sale of under-garments whose every stitch was an untacking of the body from the soul of a seamstress. "Bah!" said some. "A hypocrite, by his own confession!" said others. "Exceedingly improper!" said Mrs. Ramshorn. "Unheard-of and most unclerical behaviour! And actually to confess such paganism!" For Helen, she waked up a little, began to listen, and wondered what he had been saying that a wind seemed to have blown rustling among the heads of the congregation.

"Having made this confession," Wingfold proceeded, "you will understand that whatever I now say, I say to and of myself as much as to and of any other to whom it may apply."

He then proceeded to show that faith and obedience are one and the same spirit, passing, as it were, from room to room in the same heart: what in the heart we call faith, in the will we call obedience. He showed that the Lord refused absolutely the faith that found its vent at the lips in the worshipping words, and not at the limbs in obedient action—which some present pronounced bad theology, while others said to themselves surely that at least was common sense. For Helen, what she heard might be interesting to clergymen, or people like her aunt who had to do with such matters, but to her it was less than nothing and vanity, whose brother lay at home "sick in heart and sick in head."

But hard thoughts of him could not stay the fountain of Wingfold's utterance, which filled as it flowed. Eager after a right presentation of what truth he saw, he dwelt on the mockery it would be of any man to call him the wisest, the

best, the kindest, yea, and the dearest of men, yet never heed either the smallest request or the most urgent entreaty he made.

"A Socinian!" said Mrs. Ramshorn.

"There's stuff in that fellow!" said the rector's churchwarden, who had been brought up a Wesleyan.

"He'd make a fellow fancy he did believe all his grandmother told him!" though Bascombe.

As he went on, the awakened curate grew almost eloquent. His face shone with earnestness. Even Helen found her gaze fixed upon him, though she had not a notion what he was talking about. He closed at length with these words:

"After the confession I have now made to you, a confession which I have also entreated every one of you to whom it belongs, to make to himself and his God, it follows that I dare not call myself a Christian. How should such a one as I know anything about that which, if it be true at all, is the loftiest, the one-absorbing truth in the universe? How should such a fellow as I"—he went on, growing scornful at himself in the presence of the truth—"judge of its sacred probabilities? or, having led such a life of simony, be heard when he declares that such a pretended message from God to men seems too good to be true? The things therein contained I declared good, yet went not and did them. Therefore am I altogether out of court, and must not be heard in the matter.

"No, my hearers, I call not myself a Christian, but I call every one here who obeys the word of Jesus, who restrains anger, who declines judgment, who practises generosity, who loves his enemies, who prays for his slanderers, to witness my vow, that I too will henceforth try to obey him, in the hope that he whom he called God and his Father will reveal to me him whom you call your Lord Jesus Christ, that into my darkness I may receive the light of the world!"

"A professed infidel!" said Mrs. Ramshorn. "A clever one too! That was a fine trap he laid for us to prove us all atheists as well as himself! As if any mere mortal *could*

obey the instructions of the Saviour! He was divine; we are but human."

She might have added, "And but poor creatures as such," but did not go so far, believing herself more than an average specimen.

But there was one shining face which, like a rising sun of love and light and truth, "pillowed his chin," not "on an orient wave," but on the book-board of a free seat. The eyes of it were full of tears, and the heart behind it was giving that God and Father thanks, for this was more, far more than he had even hoped for save in the indefinite future. The light was no longer present as warmth or vivification alone, but had begun to shine as light in the heart of his friend, to whom now, praised be God! the way lay open into all truth. And when the words came, in a voice that once more trembled with emotion, "Now to God the Father," he bent down his face, and the poor, stunted, distorted frame and great gray head were grievously shaken with the sobs of a mighty gladness. Truth in the inward parts looked out upon him from the face of one who stood before the people their self-denied teacher! How would they receive it? It mattered not. Those whom the Father had drawn would hear.

Polwarth neither sought the curate in the vestry, waited for him at the church-door, nor followed him to his lodging. He was not of those who compliment a man on his fine sermon. How grandly careless are some men of the risk of ruin their praises are to their friends! "Let God praise him!" said Polwarth; "I will only dare to love him." He would not toy with his friend's waking Psyche.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOPES.

IT was the first Sunday Helen had gone to church since her brother came to her. On the previous Sunday he had passed some crisis and begun to improve, and by the end of the week was so quiet that, longing for a change of atmosphere, and believing he might be left with the housekeeper, she had gone to church. On her return she heard he was no worse, although he had "been a frettin' after her." She hurried to him as if he had been her baby.

"What do you go to church for?" he asked, half-petulantly, like a spoilt child, with languid eyes whence the hard fire had vanished. "What's the use of it?"

He looked at her, waiting for an answer.

"Not much," replied Helen. "I like the quiet and the music, that's all."

He seemed disappointed, and lay still for a few moments.

"In old times," he said at last, "the churches used to be a refuge: I suppose that is why one can't help feeling as if some safety were to be got from them yet.—Was your cousin George there this morning?"

"Yes, he went with us," answered Helen.

"I should like to see him. I want somebody to talk to."

Helen was silent. She was more occupied, however, in answering to herself the question why she shrunk so de-

cidedly from bringing Bascombe into the sick-room than in thinking what she should say to Leopold. The truth was the truth, and why should she object to Leopold's knowing, or at least being told as well as herself, that he need fear no punishment in the next world, whatever he might have to encounter in this ; that there was no frightful God who hated wrong-doing to be terrified at ; that even the badness of own action need not distress him, for he and it would pass away as the blood he had shed had already vanished from the earth ? Ought it not to encourage the poor fellow ? But to what ? To live on and endure his misery, or to put an end to it and himself at once ? Or perhaps to plunge into vice that he might escape the consciousness of guilt and the dread of the law ?

I will not say that exactly such a train of thought as this passed through her mind, but of whatever sort it was, it brought her no nearer to a desire for the light of George Bascombe's presence by the bedside of her guilty brother. At the same time her partiality for her cousin made her justify his exclusion thus : " George is so good himself, he is only fit for the company of good people. He would not in the least understand my poor Poldie, and would be too hard upon him."

Since her brother's appearance, in fact, she had seen very little of her cousin, and this not merely because her presence was so much required in the sick-chamber, but because she was herself unwilling to meet him. She had felt, almost without knowing it, that his character was unsympathetic, and that his loud, cold good-nature could never recognise or justify such love as she bore to her brother. Nor was this all ; for, remembering how he had upon one occasion expressed himself with regard to criminals, she feared even to look in his face, lest his keen, questioning, unsparing eye should read in her soul that she was the sister of a murderer.

Before this time, however, a hint of light had appeared in the clouds that enwrapped her and Leopold ; she had begun to doubt whether he had really committed the crime of

which he accused himself. There had been no inquiry after him, except from his uncle, concerning his absence from Cambridge, for which his sudden attack of brain-fever served as more than sufficient excuse. That there had been such a murder the newspapers left her no room to question ; but might not the relation in which he stood to the victim, the horror of her death, the insidious approaches of the fever, and the influences of that hateful drug, have combined to call up an hallucination of blood-guiltiness ? And what at length all but satisfied her of the truth of her conjecture was that when he began to recover, Leopold seemed himself in doubt at times whether his sense of guilt had not its origin in some one or other of the many dreams which had haunted him throughout his illness, knowing only too well that it was long since dreams had become to him more real than the greater part of what was going on around him. To this blurring and confusing of consciousness it probably contributed, that in the first stages of the fever he was under the influence of the same drug which had been working upon his brain up to the very moment when he committed the crime.

During the week the hope had almost settled into conviction ; and one consequence was that although she was not a whit more inclined to introduce George Bascombe into the sick-chamber, she found herself not only equal but no longer averse to meeting him ; and on the following Saturday, when he presented himself as usual, come to spend the Sunday, she listened to her aunt, and consented to go out with him for a ride—in the evening, however, when Mrs. Ramshorn herself, who had shown Leopold great and genuine kindness, would be able to sit with him. They therefore had dinner early, and Helen went again to her brother's room, unwilling to leave him a moment until she gave up her charge to her aunt.

They had tea together, and Leopold was very quiet. It is wonderful with what success the mind will accommodate itself, in its effort after peace, to the presence of the most torturing thought. But Helen took this quietness for a sign

of innocence, not knowing that the state of the feelings is neither test nor gauge of guilt. The nearer perfection a character is, the louder is the cry of conscience at the appearance of fault; and, on the other hand, the worst criminals have had the easiest minds.

Helen also was quiet, and fell into a dreamy mood, watching her brother, who every now and then turned on her a look of love and gratitude which moved her heart to its very depths. Not until she heard the horses coming round from the stable did she rise to go and change her dress.

"I shall not be long away from you, Poldie," she said.

"Do not forget me, Helen," he returned. "If you forget me, an enemy will think of me."

His love comforted her, and yet further strengthened her faith in his innocence; and it was with a kind of half-repose, timid, wavering, and glad, upon her countenance—how different from the old, dull, wooden quiescence!—that she joined her cousin in the hall. A moment, and he had lifted her to the saddle, and was mounted by her side.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RIDE.

A SOFT west wind, issuing as from the heart of a golden vase filled with roses, met them the instant they turned out of the street, walking their horses towards the park-gate.

Something—was it in the evening, or was it in his own soul?—had prevailed to the momentary silencing of George Bascombe: it may have been but the influence of the cigar which Helen had begged him to finish. Helen, too, was silent: she felt as if the low red sun, straight into which they seemed to be riding, blotted out her being in the level torrent of his usurping radiance. Neither of them spoke a word until they had passed through the gate into the park.

It was a perfect English summer evening—warm, but not sultry. As they walked their horses up the carriage-way the sun went down, and, as if he had fallen like a live coal into some celestial magazine of colour and glow, straightway blazed up a slow explosion of crimson and green in a golden triumph—pure fire, the smoke and fuel gone, and the radiance alone left. And now Helen received the second lesson of her initiation into the life of nature; she became aware that the whole evening was thinking around her, and as the dusk grew deeper and the night drew closer, the world seemed to have grown dark with its

thinking. Of late Helen had been driven herself to think—if not deeply, yet intensely—and so knew what it was like, and felt at home with the twilight.

They turned from the drive on to the turf. Their horses tossed up their heads, and set off, unchecked, at a good pelting gallop across the open park. On Helen's cheek the wind blew cooling, strong, and kind. As if flowing from some fountain above, in an unseen unbanked river, down through the stiller ocean of the air, it seemed to bring to her a vague promise, almost a precognition, of peace—which, however, only set her longing after something—she knew not what—something of which she only knew that it would fill the longing the wind had brought her. The longing grew and extended—went stretching on and on into an infinite of rest. And as they still galloped, and the light-maddened colours sank into smoky-peach and yellow-green and blue-gray, the something swelled and swelled in her soul, and pulled and pulled at her heart, until the tears were running down her face. For fear Bascombe should see them, she gave her horse the rein, and fled from him into the friendly dusk that seemed to grade time into eternity.

Suddenly she found herself close to a clump of trees, which overhung the deserted house. She had made a great circuit without knowing it. A pang shot to her heart, and her tears ceased to flow. The night, silent with thought, held *that* also in its bosom! She drew rein, turned, and waited for Bascombe.

"What a chase you've given me, Helen!" he cried, while yet pounding away some score of yards off.

"A wild-goose one you mean, cousin?"

"It would have been if I had thought to catch you on this ancient cocktail."

"Don't abuse the old horse, George: he has seen better days. I would gladly have mounted you more to your mind, but you know I could not—except, indeed, I had given you my Fanny, and taken the old horse myself. I have ridden him."

"The lady ought always to be the better mounted," returned George coolly. "For my part, I much prefer it, because then I need not be anxious about whether I am boring her or not: if I am, she can run away."

"You cannot suppose I thought you a bore to-night. A more sweetly silent gentleman none could wish for squire."

"Then it was my silence bored you. Shall I tell you what I was thinking about?"

"If you like. I was thinking how pleasant it would be to ride on and on and on into eternity," said Helen.

"That feeling of continuity," returned George, "is a proof of the painlessness of departure. No one can ever know when he ceases to be, because then he is not; and that is how some men come to fancy they feel as if they were going to live for ever. But the worst of it is that they no sooner fancy it than it seems to them a probable as well as a delightful thing to go on and on and never cease. This comes of the man's having no consciousness of ceasing, and when one is comfortable it always seems good to go on. A child is never willing to turn from the dish of which he is eating to another. It is more he wants, not another."

"That is if he likes it," said Helen.

"Everybody likes it," said George, "—more or less."

"I am not so sure of *every* body," replied Helen. "Do you imagine that twisted little dwarf-woman that opened the gate for us is content with her lot?"

"No, that is impossible—while she sees and remains what she is. But I said nothing of contentment. I was but thinking of the fools who, whether content or not, yet want to live for ever, and so, very conveniently, take their longing for immortality, which they call an idea innate in the human heart, for a proof that immortality is their rightful inheritance."

"How then do you account for the existence and universality of the idea?" asked Helen, who had happened lately to come upon some arguments on the other side.

But while she spoke thus indifferently she felt in her heart like one who wakes from a delicious swim in the fairest of rivers, to find that the clothes have slipped from the bed to the floor: that was all his river and all his swim!

"I account for its existence as I have just said; and for its universality by denying it. It is *not* universal, for *I* haven't it."

"At least you will not deny that men, even when miserable, shrink from dying?"

"Anything, everything is unpleasant out of its due time. I will allow, for the sake of argument, that the thought of dying is always unpleasant. But wherefore so? Because, in the very act of thinking it, the idea must always be taken *from* the time that suits with it—namely its own time, when it will at length, and ought at length, to come—and placed in the midst of the lively present, with which assuredly it does not suit. To life, death must be always hateful. In the rush and turmoil of effort, how distasteful even the cave of the hermit, let ever such a splendid view spread abroad before its mouth! But when it comes it will be pleasant enough, for then its time will have come also—the man will be prepared for it by decay and cessation. If one were to tell me that he had that endless longing for immortality, of which hitherto I have only heard at second hand, I would explain it to him thus: Your life, I would say, not being yet complete, still growing, feels in itself the onward impulse of growth, and, unable to think of itself as other than complete, interprets that onward impulse as belonging to the time around it instead of the nature within it. Or rather let me say, the man feels in himself the elements of more, and not being able to grasp the notion of his own completeness, which is so far from him, transposes the feeling of growth and sets it beyond himself, translating it at the same time into an instinct of duration, a longing after what he calls eternal life. But when the man is complete, then comes decay and brings its own contentment with it—as will also death, when it arrives in its own proper season of fulness and ripeness."

Helen said nothing in reply. She thought her cousin very clever, but could not enjoy what he said—not in the face of that sky and in the yet lingering reflection of the feelings it had waked in her. He might be right, but now, at least, she wanted no more of it. She even felt as if she would rather cherish a sweet deception for the comfort of the moment in which the weaver's shuttle flew, than take to her bosom a cold, killing fact.

Such were indeed an unworthy feeling to follow! Of all things let us have the truth—even of fact! But to deny what we cannot prove, not even casts into our ice-house a spadeful of snow. What if the warm hope denied should be the truth after all? What if it was the truth in it that drew the soul towards it by its indwelling reality, and its relations with her being, even while she took blame for suffering herself to be enticed by a sweet deception? Alas indeed for men if the life and the truth are not one, but fight against each other! Surely it says something for the divine nature of him that denies the divine, when he yet cleaves to what he thinks the truth, although it denies the life, and blots the way to the better from every chart!

"And what were you thinking of, George?" said Helen, willing to change the subject.

"I was thinking," he answered, "—let me see!—oh! yes. I was thinking of that very singular case of murder. You must have seen it in the newspapers. I have long had a doubt whether I were better fitted for a barrister or a detective. I can't keep my mind off a puzzling case. You must have heard of this one—the girl they found lying in her ball-dress in the middle of a wood, stabbed to the heart?"

"I do remember something of it," answered Helen, gathering a little courage to put into her voice from the fact that her cousin could hardly see her face. "Then the murderer has not been discovered?"

"That is the point of interest. Not a trace of him! Not a soul suspected, even!"

Helen drew a deep breath.

"Had it been in Rome, now!" George went on. "But

in a quiet country place in England! The thing seems incredible! So artistically done!—no struggle: just one blow right to the heart, and the assassin gone as if by magic! No weapon dropped! Nothing to give a clue! The whole thing suggests a practised hand. But why such a one for the victim! Had it been some false member of a secret society thus immolated, one could understand it. But a merry girl at a ball! It *is* strange. I *should* like to try the unravelling of it."

"Has nothing, then, been done?" said Helen with a gasp, to hide which she moved in her saddle as if readjusting her habit.

"Oh! everything—of course! There was instant pursuit on the discovery of the body, but they seem to have got on the track of the wrong man—or indeed, for anything certain, of no man at all. A coast-guardsman says that, on the night, or rather morning, in question, he was approaching a little cove on the shore, not above a mile from the scene of the tragedy, with an eye on what seemed to be two fishermen preparing to launch their boat, when he saw a third man come running down the steep slope from the pastures above, and jump into the stern of it. Ere he could reach the spot they were off and had hoisted two lug-sails. The moon was in the first of her last quarter, and gave light enough for what he reported. But when inquiries founded on this evidence were made, nothing whatever could be discovered concerning boat or men. The next morning no fishing-boat was lacking, and no fisherman would confess to having gone from that cove. The marks of the boat's keel and of the men's feet on the sand, if there ever were any, had been washed out by the tide. It was concluded that the thing had been pre-arranged and provided for, and that the murderer had escaped, probably to Holland. Thereupon telegrams were shot in all directions, but no news could be gathered of any suspicious landing on the opposite coast. There the matter rests, or at least has rested for many weeks. Neither parents, relatives, nor friends appear to have a suspicion of any one."

"Are there no conjectures as to motives?" asked Helen, feeling with joy her power of dissimulation gather strength.

"No end of them. She was a beautiful creature, they say, sweet-tempered as a dove, and of course fond of admiration —whence the conjectures all turn on jealousy. The most likely thing seems, that she had some squire of low degree, of whom neither parents nor friends knew anything. That they themselves suspect this, appears likely from their more than apathy with regard to the discovery of the villain. I am strongly inclined to take the matter in hand myself."

"We must get him out of the country as soon as possible," thought Helen.—"I should hardly have thought it worthy of your gifts, George," she said, "to turn policeman. For my part, I should not relish hunting down any poor wretch."

"The sacrifice of individual choice is a claim society has upon each of its members," returned Bascombe. "Every murderer hanged, or, better, imprisoned for life, is a gain to the community."

Helen said no more, and presently turned homewards, on the plea that she must not be longer absent from her invalid.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RACHEL AND HER UNCLE.

IT was nearly dark when they arrived again at the lodge. Rachel opened the gate for them. Without even a *thank you*, they rode out. She stood for a moment gazing after them through the dusk, then turned with a sigh, and went into the kitchen, where her uncle sat by the fire with a book in his hand.

"How I should like to be as well made as Miss Lingard!" she said, seating herself by the lamp that stood on the deal table. "It *must* be a fine thing to be strong and tall, and able to look this way and that without turning all your body along with your head, like the old man that gathers the leeches in Wordsworth's poem. And what it must be to sit on a horse as she does! You should have seen her go flying like the very wind across the park! You would have thought she and her horse were cut out of the same piece. I'm dreadfully envious, uncle."

"No, my child; I know you better than you do yourself. There is a great difference between *I wish I was* and *I should like to be*—as much as between a grumble and a prayer. To be content is not to be satisfied. No one ought to be satisfied with the imperfect. It is God's will that we should bear, and contentedly—because in hope, looking for the redemption of the body. And we know he has a ready servant who will one day set us free."

"Yes, uncle; I understand. You know I enjoy life: how could I help it and you with me? But I don't think I ever go through the churchyard without feeling a sort of triumph. 'There's for you!' I say sometimes to the little crooked shadow that creeps along by my side across the graves. '*You'll* soon be caught and put inside!' But how am I to tell I mayn't be crooked in the next world as well as this? That's what troubles me at times. There might be some necessity for it, you know."

"Then will there be patience to bear it there also;—that you may be sure of. But I do not fear. It were more likely that those who have not thanked God, but prided themselves, that they were beautiful in this world, should be crooked in the next. It would be like Dives and Lazarus, you know. But God does what is best for them as well as for us. We shall find one day that beauty and riches were the best things for those to whom they were given, as deformity and poverty were the best for us."

"I wonder what sort of person I would have been if I had had a straight spine!" said Rachel, laughing.

"Hardly one so dear to your deformed uncle," said her companion in ugliness.

"Then I'm glad I am as I am," rejoined Rachel.

"This conscious individuality of ours," said Polwarth, after a thoughtful silence, "is to me an awful thing—the one thing that seems in humanity like the onliness of God. Mine terrifies me sometimes—looking a stranger to me—a limiting of myself—a breaking in upon my existence—like a volcanic outburst into the blue Sicilian air. When it thus manifests itself, I find no refuge but the offering of it back to him who thought it worth making. I say to him, 'Lord, it is thine, not mine; see to it, Lord. Thou and thy eternity are mine, Father of Jesus Christ.'"

He covered his eyes with his hands, and his lips grew white and trembled. Thought had turned into prayer, and both were silent for a space. Rachel was the first to speak.

"I think I understand, uncle," she said. "I don't mind

being God's dwarf. But I would rather be made after his own image: this can't be it. I should like to be made over again."

"And if the hope we are saved by be no mockery, if St. Paul was not the fool of his own radiant imaginings, you will be, my child. But now let us forget our miserable bodies. Come up to my room, and I will read you a few lines that came to me this morning in the park."

"Won't you wait for Mr. Wingfold, uncle? He will be here yet, I think. It can't be ten o'clock yet. He always looks in on Saturdays as he goes home from his walk. I should like you to read them to him too. They will do him good, I know."

"I would, my dear, willingly, if I thought he would care for them. But I don't think he would. They are not good enough verses. He has been brought up on Horace, and I fear counts the best poetry the neatest."

"I think you must be mistaken there, uncle; I have heard him talk delightfully about poetry."

"You must excuse me if I am shy of reading my poor work to any but yourself, Rachel. My heart was so much in it, and the subject is so sacred—"

"I am sorry you should think your pearls too good to cast before Mr. Wingfold, uncle," said Rachel, with a touch of disappointed temper.

"Nay, nay, child!" returned Polwarth, "that was not a good thing to say. What gives me concern is that there is so much of the rough dirty shell sticking about them, that to show them would be to wrong the truth in them."

Rachel seldom took long to repent. She came slowly to her uncle, where he stood with the lamp in his hand, looking in his face with a heavenly contrition, and saying nothing. When she reached him, she dropped on her knees and kissed the hand that hung by his side. Her temper was poor Rachel's one sore-felt trouble.

Polwarth stooped and kissed her on the forehead, raised her, and leading her to the stair, stood aside to let her go

first. But when she had been naughty Rachel would never go before her uncle, and she drew back. With a smile of intelligence he yielded and led the way. But ere they had climbed to the top, Rachel heard Mr. Wingfold's step, and went down again to receive him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A DREAM.

INVITED to ascend, Wingfold followed Rachel to her uncle's room, and there, whether guided by her or not, the conversation presently took such a turn that at length, of his own motion, Polwarth offered to read his verses. From the drawer of his table he took a scratched and scored half-sheet, and—not in the most melodious of voices, yet in one whose harshness and weakness could not cover a certain refinement of spiritual tenderness—read as follows :

Lord, hear my discontent : All blank I stand,
A mirror polished by thy hand ;
Thy sun's beams flash and flame from me—
I cannot help it : here I stand, there he ;
To one of them I cannot say,
Go, and on yonder water play.
Nor one poor ragged daisy can I fashion—
I do not make the words of this my limping passion.
If I should say, Now I will think a thought,
Lo ! I must wait, unknowing,
What thought in me is growing,
Until the thing to birth is brought ;
Nor know I then what next will come
From out the gulf of silence dumb.
I am the door the thing did find
To pass into the general mind ;
I cannot say I think—
I only stand upon the thought-well's brink ;

From darkness to the sun the water bubbles up--
I lift it in my cup.
Thou only thinkest—I am thought;
Me and my thought thou thinkest. Nought
Am I but as a fountain spout
From which thy water welleth out.
Thou art the only One, the All in all.
—Yet when my soul on thee doth call
And thou dost answer out of everywhere,
I in thy allness have my perfect share.

While he read Rachel crept to his knee, knelt down, and laid her head upon it.

If we are but the creatures of a day, yet surely were the shadow-joys of this miserable pair not merely nobler in their essence, but finer to the soul's palate than the shadow-joys of young Hercules Bascombe—Helen and horses and all! Poor Helen I cannot use for comparison, for she had no joy, save, indeed, the very divine, though at present unblossoming, one of sisterly love. Still, and notwithstanding, if the facts of life are those of George Bascombe's indorsing —*and he can prove it*, let us by all means learn and accept them, be they the worst possible. Meantime there are truths that ought to be facts, and until he has proved that there is no God, some of us will go feeling after him if haply we may find him, and in him the truths we long to find true. Some of us perhaps think we have seen him from afar, but we only know the better that in the mood wherein such as Bascombe are they will never find him—which would no doubt be to them a comfort were it not for a laughter. And if he be such as their idea of what we think him, they *are* better without him. If on the contrary he be what some of us really think him, their not seeking him will not perhaps prevent him from finding them.

From likeness of nature, community of feeling, constant intercourse, and perfect confidence, Rachel understood her uncle's verses with sufficient ease to enjoy them at once in part, and, for the rest, to go on thinking in the direction in which they would carry her; but Wingfold, in whom honesty of disposition had blossomed at last into honesty of will and action, after fitting pause, during which no word was spoken, said,

"Mr. Polwarth, where verse is concerned I am simply stupid: when read, I cannot follow it. I did not understand the half of that poem. I never have been a student of English verse, and indeed that part of my nature which has to do with poetry has been a good deal neglected. Will you let me take those verses home with me?"

"I cannot do that, for they are not legible; but I will copy them out for you."

"Will you give me them to-morrow? Shall you be at church?"

"That shall be just as you please: would you rather have me there or not?"

"A thousand times rather," answered the curate. "To have one man there who knows what I mean better than I can say it, is to have a double soul and double courage.—But I came to-night mainly to tell you that I have been much puzzled this last week to know how I ought to regard the Bible—I mean as to its inspiration. What am I to say about it?"

"Those are two distinct things. Why think of saying about it before you have anything to say? For yourself, however, let me ask if you have not already found in the book the highest means of spiritual education and development you have yet met with? If so, may not that suffice for the present? It is the man Christ Jesus we have to know, and the Bible we have to use to that end—not for theory or dogma.—I will tell you a strange dream I had once, not long ago."

Rachel's face brightened. She rose, got a little stool, and setting it down close by the chair on which her uncle was perched, seated herself at his feet, with her eyes on the ground, to listen.

"About two years ago," said Polwarth, "a friend sent me Tauchnitz's edition of the English New Testament, which has the different readings of the three oldest known manuscripts translated at the foot of the page. The edition was prepared chiefly for the sake of showing the results of the collation of the Sinaitic manuscript, the oldest of all, so

named because it was found—a few years ago, by Tischendorf—in a monastery on Mount Sinai—nowhere else than there! I received it with such exultation as brought on an attack of asthma, and I could scarce open it for a week, but lay with it under my pillow. When I did come to look at it, my main wonder was to find the differences from the common version so few and small. Still there were some such as gave rise to a feeling far above mere interest—one in particular, the absence of a word that had troubled me, not seeming like a word of our Lord, or consonant with his teaching. I am unaware whether the passage has ever given rise to controversy."

"May I ask what word it was?" interrupted Wingfold eagerly.

"I will not say," returned Polwarth. "Not having troubled you, you would probably only wonder why it should have troubled me. For my purpose in mentioning the matter, it is enough to say that I had turned with eagerness to the passage wherein it occurs, as given in two of the gospels in our version. Judge my delight in discovering that in the one gospel the whole passage was omitted by the two oldest manuscripts, and in the other just the one word that had troubled me by the same two. I would not have you suppose me foolish enough to imagine that the oldest manuscript must be the most correct; but you will at once understand the sense of room and air which the discovery gave me notwithstanding, and I mention it because it goes both to account for the dream that followed and to enforce its truth. Pray do not, however, imagine me a believer in dreams more than in any other source of mental impressions. If a dream reveal a principle, that principle is a revelation, and the dream is neither more *nor less* valuable than a waking thought that does the same. The truth conveyed is the revelation. I do not deny that facts have been learned in dreams, but I would never call the communication of a mere fact a revelation. Truth alone, beheld as such by the soul, is worthy of the name. Facts, however, may themselves be the instruments of such revelation.

"The dream I am now going to tell you was clearly enough led up to by my waking thoughts. For I had been saying to myself ere I fell asleep, 'On the very Mount Sinai that once burned with heavenly fire and resounded with the thunder of a visible Presence, now old and cold, and swathed in the mists of legend and doubt, was discovered the most reverend, because most ancient, record of the new dispensation which dethroned that mountain and silenced the thunders of the pedagogue law! Is it not possible that yet, in some ancient convent, insignificant to the eye of the traveller as modern Nazareth would be but for its ancient story, some one of the original gospel-manuscripts may lie, truthful and unblotted from the hand of the very evangelist? O lovely parchment!' I thought—'if eye of man might but see thee! if lips of man might kiss thee!' and my heart swelled like the heart of a lover at the thought of such a boon. Now, as you know, I live in a sort of live coffin here," continued the little man, striking his pigeon-breast, "with a barrel-organ of discords in it, constantly out of order in one way or another; and hence it comes that my sleep is so imperfect, and my dreams run more than is usual, as I believe, on in the direction of my last waking thoughts. Well, that night, I dreamed thus: I was in a desert. It was neither day nor night to me. I saw neither sun, moon, nor stars. A heavy yet half-luminous cloud hung over the visible earth. My heart was beating fast and high, for I was journeying towards a certain Armenian convent, where I had good ground for hoping I should find the original manuscript of the fourth gospel, the very hand-writing of the apostle John. That the old man did not write it himself, I never thought of that in my dream.

"After I had walked on for a long, anything but weary time, I saw the level horizon line before me broken by a rock, as it seemed, rising from the plain of the desert. I knew it was the monastery. It was many miles away, and as I journeyed on, it grew and grew, until it swelled huge as a hill against the sky. At length I came up to the door, iron-clamped, deep-set in a low, thick wall. It stood wide

open. I entered, crossed a court, reached the door of the monastery itself, and again entered. Every door to which I came stood open, but priest nor guide came to meet me, and I saw no man, and at length looked for none, but used my best judgment to get deeper and deeper into the building, for I scarce doubted that in its inmost penetralia I should find the treasure I sought. At last I stood before a door hung with a curtain of rich workmanship, torn in the middle from top to bottom. Through the rent I passed into a stone cell. In the cell stood a table. On the table was a closed book. Oh! how my heart beat! Never but then have I known the feeling of utter preciousness in a thing possessed. What doubts and fears would not this one lovely, oh! unutterably beloved volume, lay at rest for ever! How my eyes would dwell upon every stroke of every letter the hand of the dearest disciple had formed! Nearly eighteen hundred years—and there it lay!—and there *was* a man who *did* hear the Master say the words, and did set them down! I stood motionless, and my soul seemed to wind itself among the leaves, while my body stood like a pillar of salt, lost in its own gaze. At last, with sudden daring, I made a step towards the table, and, bending with awe, outstretched my hand to lay it upon the book. But ere my hand reached it, another hand, from the opposite side of the table, appeared upon it—an old, blue-veined, but powerful hand. I looked up. There stood the beloved disciple! His countenance was as a mirror from which shone back the face of the Master. Slowly he lifted the book, and turned away. Then first I saw behind him as it were an altar whereon a fire of wood was burning, and a pang of dismay shot to my heart, for I knew what he was about to do. He laid the book on the burning wood, and regarded it with a smile as it shrunk and shrivelled and smouldered to ashes. Then he turned to me and said, while a perfect heaven of peace shone in his eyes: 'Son of man, the Word of God liveth and abideth for ever, not in the volume of the book, but in the heart of the man that in love obeyeth him.' And therewith I awoke weeping, but with the lesson of my dream."

A deep silence fell on the little company. Then said Wingfold,

"I trust I have the lesson too."

He rose, shook hands with them, and, without another word, went home.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ANOTHER SERMON.

IT often seems to those in earnest about the right as if all things conspired to prevent their progress. This, of course, is but an appearance, arising in part from this, that the pilgrim must be headed back from the side-paths into which he is constantly wandering. To Wingfold, however, it seemed that all things fell in to further his quest, which will not be so surprising if we remember that his was no intermittent repentant seeking, but the struggle of his whole energy. And there are those who in their very first seeking of it are nearer to the kingdom of heaven than many who have for years believed themselves of it. In the former there is more of the mind of Jesus, and when he calls them, they recognise him at once and go after him ; while the others examine him from head to foot, and finding him not sufficiently like the Jesus of their conception, turn their backs, and go to church or chapel or chamber to kneel before a vague form mingled of tradition and fancy. But the first shall be last and the last first, and there are from whom, be it penny or be it pound, what they have must be taken away because with them it lies useless.

For Wingfold, he soon found that his nature was being stirred to depths unsuspected before. Hitherto nothing had ever roused him to genuine activity : his history was not very

happy, his life not very interesting, his work not congenial, and paying itself in no satisfaction, his pleasures of a cold and common intellectual sort, he had dragged along, sustained, without the sense of its sustentation, by the germ within him of a slowly-developing honesty. But now that Conscience had got up into the guard's seat, and Will had taken the reins, he found all his intellectual faculties in full play, keeping well together, heads up and traces tight, while the outrider Imagination, with his spotted dog Fancy, was always far ahead, but never beyond the sound of the guard's horn ; and ever as they went, object after object hitherto beyond the radius of his interest rose on the horizon of question, and began to glimmer in the dawn of human relation.

His first sermon is enough to show that he had begun to have thoughts of his own—a very different thing from the entertaining of the thoughts of others, however well we may feed and lodge them—thoughts which came to him not as things which sought an entrance, but as things that sought an exit—cried for forms of embodiment that they might pass out of the infinite, and by incarnation become communicable.

The news of that strange first sermon had of course spread through the town, and the people came to church the next Sunday in crowds—twice as many as the usual assembly—some who went seldom, some who went nowhere, some who belonged to other congregations and communities—mostly bent on witnessing whatever eccentricity the very peculiar young man might be guilty of next, but having a few among them who were sympathetically interested in seeing how far his call, if call it was, would lead him.

His second sermon was to the same purport as the first. Proposing no text, he spoke to the following effect, and indeed the following are of the very words he uttered :

"The church wherein you now listen, my hearers, the pulpit wherein I now speak, stand here from of old in the name of Christianity. What is Christianity? I know but one definition, the analysis of which, if the thing in question be a truth, must be the joyous labour of every devout heart to all eternity. For Christianity does not mean what you think or what I

think concerning Christ, but what *is of* Christ. My Christianity, if ever I come to have any, will be what of Christ is in me ; your Christianity now is what of Christ as is in you. Last Sunday I showed you our Lord's very words—that he, and no other, was his disciple who did what he told him—and said, therefore, that I dared not call myself a disciple. I say the same thing in saying now that I dare not call myself a Christian, lest I should offend him with my 'Lord, Lord !' Still it is, and I cannot now help it, in the name of Christianity that I here stand. I have—alas ! with blameful and appalling thoughtlessness !—subscribed my name, as a believer, to the articles of the Church of England, with no better reason than that I was unaware of any dissent therefrom, and have been ordained one of her ministers. The relations into which this has brought me I do not feel justified in severing at once, lest I should therein seem to deny that which its own illumination may yet show me to be true, and I desire therefore a little respite and room for thought and resolve. But meantime it remains my business, as an honest man in the employment of the church, to do my best towards the setting forth of the claims of him upon whom that church is founded, and in whose name she exists. As one standing on the outskirts of a listening Galilean crowd, a word comes now and then to my hungry ears and hungrier heart : I turn and tell it again to you—not that ye have not heard it also, but that I may stir you up to ask yourselves : 'Do I then obey this word? Have I ever, have I once, sought to obey it? Am I a pupil of Jesus? Am I a Christian?' Hear then of his words. For me, they fill my heart with doubt and dismay.

"The Lord says, *Love your enemies.* Sayest thou, *It is impossible?* Then dost thou mock the word of him who said, *I am the Truth*, and hast no part in him. Sayest thou, *Alas! I cannot?* Thou sayest true, I doubt not. But hast thou tried whether he who made will not increase the strength put forth to obey him?

"The Lord says, *Be ye perfect.* Dost thou then aim after perfection, or dost thou excuse thy wilful shortcomings, and

say *To err is human*—nor hopest that it may also be found human to grow divine? Then ask thyself, for thou hast good cause, whether thou hast any part in him.

"The Lord said, *Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.* My part is not now to preach against the love of money, but to ask you, *Are* you laying up for yourselves treasures on earth? As to what the command means, the honest heart and the dishonest must each settle it in his own way; but if your heart condemn you, what I have to say is, Call not yourselves Christians, but consider whether you ought not to become disciples indeed. No doubt you can instance this, that, and the other man who does as you do, and of whom yet no man dreams of questioning the Christianity: it matters not a hair; all that goes but to say that you are pagans together. Do not mistake me: I judge you not. But I ask you, as mouth-piece most unworthy of that Christianity in the name of which this building stands and we are met therein, to judge your own selves by the words of its founder.

"The Lord said, *Take no thought for your life. Take no thought for the morrow.* Explain it as you may or can; but ask yourselves, Do I take no thought for my life? Do I take no thought for the morrow? and answer to yourselves whether or no ye are Christians.

"The Lord says, *Judge not.* Didst thou judge thy neighbour yesterday? Wilt thou judge him again to-morrow? Art thou judging him now in the very heart that within thy bosom sits hearing the words *Judge not?* Or wilt thou ask yet again, Who is my neighbour? How then canst thou look to be of those that shall enter through the gates into the city? I tell thee not, for I profess not yet to know anything, but doth not thine own profession of Christianity counsel thee to fall upon thy face, and cry to him whom thou mockest, 'I am a sinful man, O Lord'?

"The Lord said, *All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.* Ye that buy and sell, do you obey this law? Examine yourselves and see. Ye would that men should deal fairly by you: do you deal

fairly by them as ye would count fairness in them to you? If conscience makes you hang the head inwardly, however you sit with it erect in the pew, dare you add to your crime against the law and the prophets the insult to Christ of calling yourselves his disciples?

"*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* He will none but those who with him do the will of the Father."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NURSING.

I HAVE of course given but the spine and ribs, as it were, of the sermon. There is no place for more. It is enough, however, to show that he came to the point—and what can be better in preaching? Certainly he was making the best of the blunder that had led him up into that pulpit! And on the other hand, whatever might be the various judgments and opinions of his hearers in respect of the sermon—a thing about which the less any preacher allows himself to think the better—many of them did actually feel that he had been preaching to them, which is saying much. Even Mrs. Ramshorn was more silent than usual as they went home, and although—not having acquainted herself, amongst others, with the sermons of Latimer—she was profoundly convinced that such preaching was altogether contrary to the tradition, usage, and tone of the English Church, of which her departed dean remained to her the unimpeachable embodiment and type, the sole remark she made was that Mr. Wingfold took quite too much pains to prove himself a pagan. Mr. Bascombe was in the same mind as before.

"I like the fellow," he said. "He says what he means, fair and full, and no shilly-shallying. It's all great rubbish, of course!"

And the widow of the dean of blessed memory had not a

word to say in defence of the sermon, but, for her, let it go as the great rubbish he called it. Indeed, not knowing the real mind of her nephew, she was nothing less than gratified to hear from him an opinion so comfortably hostile to that of this most uncomfortable of curates, whom you never could tell where to have, and whom never since he had confessed to wrong in the reading of his uncle's sermons, and thus unwittingly cast a reproach upon the memory of him who had departed from the harassed company of deans militant to the blessed company of deans triumphant, had she invited to share at her table of the good things left behind.

"Why don't you ask him home to dinner, aunt?" said Bascombe, after a pause unbroken by Mrs. Ramshorn.

"Why should I, George?" returned his aunt. "Has he not been abusing us all at a most ignorant and furious rate?"

"Oh! I didn't know," said the nephew, and held his peace. Nor did the aunt perceive the sarcasm for the sake of pointing which he was silent. But it was not lost, and George was paid in full by the flicker of a faint smile across Helen's face.

As for Helen, the sermon had indeed laid a sort of feebly electrical hold upon her, the mere nervous influence of honesty and earnestness. But she could not accuse herself of having ever made a prominent profession of Christianity, confirmation and communion notwithstanding; and besides, had she not now all but abjured the whole thing in her heart? so that if every word of what he said was true, not a word of it could be applied to her! and what time had she to think about such far-away things as had happened eighteen centuries ago, when there was her one darling pining away with a black weight on his heart!

For, although Leopold was gradually recovering, a supreme dejection, for which his weakness was insufficient to account, prostrated his spirit, and at length drove Mr. Faber to ask Helen whether she knew of any disappointment or other source of mental suffering that could explain it. She told him of the habit he had formed, and asked

whether his being deprived of the narcotic might not be the cause. He accepted the suggestion, and set himself, not without some success, to repair the injury the abuse had occasioned. Still, although his physical condition plainly improved, the dejection continued, and Mr. Faber was thrown back upon his former conjecture. Learning nothing, however, and yet finding that, as he advanced towards health, his dejection plainly deepened, he began at length to fear softening of the brain, but could discover no other symptom of such disease.

The earnestness of the doctor's quest after a cause for what any one might observe added greatly to Helen's uneasiness ; and besides, the fact itself began to undermine the hope of his innocence which had again sprung up and almost grown to assurance in the absence of any fresh contradiction from without. Also, as his health returned, his sleep became more troubled ; he dreamed more, and showed by his increased agitation in his dreams that they were more painful. In this respect his condition was at the worst always between two and three o'clock in the morning ; and having perceived this fact, Helen would never allow any one to sit up with him the first part of the night except herself.

Increased anxiety and continued watching soon told upon her health yet more severely, and she lost appetite and complexion. Still she slept well during the latter part of the morning, and was always down before her aunt had finished breakfast ; and it was in vain that aunt and doctor and nurse all expostulated with her upon the excess of her ministration : nothing should make her yield her post until her brother was himself again. Nor was she without her reward, and that a sufficing one—in the love and gratitude with which Leopold clung to her.

During the day, also, she spent every moment, except such as she passed in the open air and at table with her aunt, by his bedside, reading and talking to him ; but yet not a single allusion had been made to the frightful secret.

At length he was so much better that there was no longer need for any one to sit up with him; but then Helen had her bed put in the dressing-room that at one o'clock she might be by his side, to sit there until three should be well over and gone.

Thus she gave up her whole life to him, and doubtless thereby gained much fresh interest in it for herself. But the weight of the secret and the dread of the law were too much for her, and were gradually undermining that strength of dissimulation in which she had trusted, and which, in respect of cheerfulness, she had to exercise towards her brother as well as her aunt. She struggled hard, for if those weak, despairing eyes of his were to encounter weakness and despair in hers, madness itself would be at the door for both. She had come nearly to the point of discovering that the soul is not capable of generating its own requirements, that it needs to be supplied from a well whose springs lie deeper than its own soil, in the infinite All, namely, upon which that soil rests. Happy they who have found that those springs have an outlet in their hearts—on the hill of prayer.

It was very difficult to lay her hands on reading that suited him. Gifted with a glowing yet delicate eastern imagination, pampered and all but ruined, he was impatient of narratives of common life, whose current bore him to a reservoir and no sea; while, on the other hand, some tales that seemed to Helen poverty-stricken flats of nonsense, or jumbles of false invention, would in her brother wake an interest she could not understand, appearing to afford him outlooks into regions to her unknown. But from the moral element in any story he shrank visibly. She tried the German tales collected by the brothers Grimm, so popular with children of all ages; but on the very first attempt she blundered into an awful one of murder and vengeance, in which, if the drawing was untrue, the colour was strong, and had to blunder clumsily out of it again, with a hot face and a cold heart. At length she betook herself to the Thousand and One Nights, which she had never read, and

found very dull, but which with Leopold served for what book could do.

In the rest of the house things went on much the same. Old friends and their daughters called on Mrs. Ramshorn and inquired after the invalid, and George Bascombe came almost every Saturday, and stayed till Monday. But the moment the tide of her trouble began again to rise, Helen found herself less desirous of meeting one from whom she could hope neither help nor cheer. It might be that future generations of the death-doomed might pass their poor life a little more comfortably that she had not been a bad woman, and she might be privileged to pass away from the world, as George taught her, without earning the curses of those that came after her; but there was her precious brother lying before her with a horrible worm gnawing at his heart, and what to her were a thousand generations unborn! Rather with Macbeth she might well "wish the estate o' the world were now undone"—most of all when, in the silent watches of the night, as she sat by the bedside of her beloved and he slept, his voice would come murmuring out of a dream, sounding so far away that it seemed as if his spirit only and not his lips had spoken the words, "O Helen! darling, give me my knife. Why will you not let me die?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GLASTON AND THE CURATE.

OUTSIDE, the sun rose and set, never a crimson thread the less in the garment of his glory that the spirit of one of the children of the earth was stained with blood-guiltiness ; the moon came up and knew nothing of the matter ; the stars minded their own business ; and the people of Glaston were talking about their curate's sermons. Alas ! it was about his sermons and not the subject of them that men talked, their interest mainly roused by their *peculiarity*, and what some called the oddity of the preacher.

What had come to him ? He was not in the least like that for months after his appointment, and the change came all at once ! Yes, it began with those extravagant notions about honesty in writing his own sermons ! It might have been a sunstroke, but it took him far too early in the year for that ! Softening of the brain it might be, poor fellow ! Was not excessive vanity sometimes a symptom ? Poor fellow !

So said some. But others said he was a clever fellow, and long-headed enough to know that that sort of thing attracted attention, and might open the way to a benefice, or at least an engagement in London, where eloquence was of more account than in a dead-and-alive country place like Glaston,

from which the tide of grace had ebbed, leaving that great ship of the church, the Abbey, high and dry on the shore.

Others again judged him a fanatic—a dangerous man. Such did not all venture to assert that he had erred from the way, but what man was more dangerous than he who went too far? Possibly these forgot that the narrow way can hardly be one to sit down in comfortably, or indeed to be entered at all save by him who tries the gate with the intent of going all the way—even should it lead up to the perfection of the Father in heaven. "But," they would in effect have argued, "is not a fanatic dangerous? and is not an enthusiast always in peril of becoming a fanatic? Be his enthusiasm for what it may—for Jesus Christ, for God himself—such a man is dangerous, most dangerous! There are so many things comfortably settled, like Presumption's tubs, upon their own bottoms, which such men would, if they could, at once upset and empty!"

Others suspected a Romanising drift in the whole affair. "Wait until he gathers influence," they said, "and a handful of followers, and then you'll see! They'll be all back to Rome together in a month!"

As the wind took by the tail St. Peter's cock on the church-spire and whirled it about, so did the wind of words in Glaston rudely seize and flack hither and thither the spiritual reputation of Thomas Wingfold, curate. And all the time the young man was wrestling, his life in his hand, with his own unbelief; while upon his horizon ever and anon rose the glimer of a great aurora or the glimpse of a boundless main—if only he could have been sure they were no mirage of his own parched heart and hungry eye; that they were thoughts in the mind of the Eternal, and *therefore* had appeared in his, even as the Word was said to have become flesh and dwelt with men! The next moment he would be gasping in that malarious exhalation from the marshes of his neglected heart—the counter-fear, namely, that the word under whose potent radiance the world seemed on the verge of budding forth and blossoming as the rose was *too good to be true.*

"Yes, much too good, if there be no living, self-willing God," said Polwarth one evening, in answer to the phrase just dropped from his lips. "But if there be such a God as alone could be God, can anything be too good to be true—too good for such a God as contented Jesus Christ?"

At one moment he was ready to believe everything, even to that strangest, yet to me right credible, miracle of the fish and the piece of money, and the next to doubt whether man had ever dared utter the words, "I and the Father are one." Tossed he was and tormented in spirit, calling even aloud sometimes to know if there was a God anywhere hearing his prayer, sure only of this, that whatever else any being might be, if he heard not prayer, he could not be the God for whom his soul cried and fainted. Sometimes there came to him, it is true, what he would gladly have taken for an answer, but it was nothing more than a sudden descent of a kind of calmness on his spirit, which, for aught he could tell, might be but the calm of exhaustion. His knees were sore with kneeling, his face white with thinking, his eye dim with trouble; for when once a man has set out to find God, he must find him or die. This was the inside reality whose outcome set the public of Glaston babbling. It was from this that George Bascombe magisterially pronounced him a hypochondriac, worrying his brain about things that had no existence—as George himself could with confidence testify, not once having seen the sight of them, heard the sound of them, or imagined in his heart that they ought to be, or even that they might possibly be. He pronounced, indeed, their existence inconsistent with his own. The thought had never rippled the gray mass of his self-satisfied brain that perhaps there was more of himself than what he counted himself yet knew, and that possibly these matters had a consistent relation with parts unknown. Poor, poverty-stricken Wingfold! actually craving for things beneath Bascombe's notice! actually crying for something higher and brighter than the moon! How independent was George compared with Thomas! content to live what he called his life, be a benefactor to men, chiefly in ridding their fancies of the

goblins of aspiration, then die his death, and have done with the business; while poor, misguided, weak-brained, hypochondriacal Thomas could be contented with nothing less than the fulfilment of the promise of a certain man who perhaps never existed: "The Father and I will come to him and make our abode with him."

Yet Thomas, too, had his weakness for the testimony of the senses. If he did not, like George, refuse to believe without it, he yet could not help desiring signs and wonders that he might believe. Of this the following poem was a result, and I give it the more willingly because it will show how the intellectual nature of the man had advanced, borne on the waves that burst from the fountains of the great deep below it:

O Lord! if on the wind, at cool of day,
I heard one whispered word of mighty grace;
If through the darkness, as in bed I lay,
But once had come a hand upon my face;

If but one sign that might not be mistook,
Had ever been, since first thy face I sought,
I should not now be doubting o'er a book,
But serving thee with burning heart and thought.

So dreams that heart. But to my heart I say,
Turning my face to front the dark and wind:
Such signs had only barred anew His way
Into thee, longing heart, thee, wildered mind.

They asked the very Way, where lies the way;
The very Son, where is the Father's face;
How he could show himself, if not in clay,
Who was the Lord of spirit, form, and space?

My being, Lord, will nevermore be whole
Until thou come behind mine ears and eyes,
Enter and fill the temple of my soul
With perfect contact—such a sweet surprise—

Such presence as, before it met the view,
The prophet-fancy could not once foresee,
Though every corner of the temple knew
By very emptiness its need of thee.

When I keep *all* thy words, no favoured some—
Heedless of worldly winds or judgment's tide,
Then, Jesus, thou wilt with thy Father come—
O ended prayers !—and in my soul abide.

Ah ! long delay ! ah ! cunning, creeping sin !
I shall but fail and cease at length to try :
O Jesus ! though thou wilt not yet come in,
Knock at my window as thou passest by.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE LINEN-DRAPER.

BUT there was yet another class among those who on that second day heard the curate testify what honestly he might, and no more, concerning Jesus of Nazareth. So far as he learned, however, that class consisted of one individual.

On the following Tuesday morning he went into the shop of the chief linen-draper of Glaston, for he was going to a funeral, and wanted a new pair of gloves that he might decline those which would be offered to him. A young woman waited on him, but Mr. Drew, seeing him from the other end of the shop, came and took her place. When he was fitted, had paid for his purchase and was turning to take his leave, the draper, with what appeared a resolution suddenly forced from hesitation, leaned over the counter and said,

"Would you mind walking up stairs for a few minutes, sir? I ask it as a great favour. I want very much to speak to you."

"I shall be most happy," answered Wingfold—conventionally, it must be allowed, for in reality he anticipated expostulation, and having in his public ministrations to do his duty against his own grain, he had no fancy for encountering other people's grain as well in private. Mr. Drew opened certain straits in the counter, and the curate

followed him through them, then through a door, up a stair, and into a comfortable dining-room, which smelt strongly of tobacco. There Mr. Drew placed for him a chair, and seated himself in front of him.

The linen-draper was a middle-aged, middle-sized, stoutish man, with plump, rosy cheeks, keen black eyes, and features of the not uncommon pug-type, ennobled and harmonised by a genuine expression of kindly good-humour, and an excellent forehead. His dark hair was a little streaked with gray. His manner, which in the shop had been of the shop—that is, more deferential and would-be pleasing than Wingfold liked—settled, as he took his seat, into one more resembling that of a country gentleman. It was courteous and friendly, but clouded with a little anxiety.

An uncomfortable pause following, Wingfold stumbled in with the question, "I hope Mrs. Drew is well," without reflecting whether he had really ever heard of a Mrs. Drew.

The draper's face flushed.

"It's twenty years since I lost her, sir," he returned. In his tone and manner there was something peculiar.

"I beg your pardon," said Wingfold, with self-accusing sincerity.

"I will be open with you, sir," continued his host; "she left me—with another—nearly twenty years ago."

"I am ashamed of my inadvertence," rejoined Wingfold. "I have been such a short time here, and—"

"Do not mention it, sir. How could you help it? Besides, it was not here the thing took place, but a hundred miles away. I hope I should before long have referred to the fact myself. But now I desire, if you will allow me, to speak of something different."

"I am at your service," answered Wingfold.

"Thank you, sir. I was in your church last Sunday," resumed the draper, after a pause. "I am not one of your regular hearers, sir; but your sermon that day set me thinking, and instead of thinking less when Monday came, I have been thinking more and more ever since; and when I saw you in the shop, I could not resist the sudden desire to

speak to you. If you have time, sir, I hope you will allow me to come to the point my own way?"

Wingfold assured him that his time was at his own disposal, and could not be better occupied. Mr. Drew thanked him, and went on.

"Your sermon, I must confess, sir, made me uncomfortable —no fault of yours, sir; all my own; though how much the fault is I hardly know: use and custom are hard upon a man, sir, and you would have a man go by other laws than those of the world he lives in. 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof,' you will doubtless say. That is over the Royal Exchange in London, I think; but it is not the laws of the Lord that are specially followed inside, for all that. However, it is not with other people we have to do, but with ourselves—as you will say. Well, then, it is for myself I am troubled now. Mr. Wingfold, sir, I am not altogether at ease in my own mind as to the way I have made my money—what little money I have—no great sum, but enough to retire upon when I please. I would not have you think me worse than I am, but I am sincerely desirous of knowing what you would have me to do."

"My dear sir," returned Wingfold, "I am the very last to look to for enlightenment. I am as ignorant of business as any child. I am not aware that I ever bought anything except books and clothes, or ever sold anything except a knife to a schoolfellow—I had bought it the day before for half a crown, but there was a spot of rust on one of the blades, and therefore I parted with it for twopence. The only thing I can say is, if you have been in the way of doing anything you are no longer satisfied with, don't do it any more."

"But just there comes my need of help. You must do something with your business, and *don't do it* don't tell me what to do. Mind, I do not confess to having done anything the trade would count inadmissible, or which is not done in the largest establishments. What I now make question of I learned in one of the most respectable of London houses."

"You imply that a man in your line who would not do

certain things the doing of which has contributed to the making of your fortune, would by the ordinary dealer be regarded as Quixotic?"

"He would; but that there may be such men I am bound to allow, for here am I wishing with all my heart that I had never done them. Right gladly would I give up the money I have made by them to be rid of them. I am unhappy about it. But I should never have dared to confess it to you, sir, or, I believe, to any one, but for the confession you made in the pulpit some time ago. I was not there, but I heard of it. I foolishly judged you unwise to accuse yourself before an unsympathising public—but here I am in consequence accusing myself to you!"

"To no unsympathising hearer, though," said the curate.

"It made me want to go and hear you preach," pursued the draper; "for no one could say but it was plucky—and we all like pluck, sir," he added, with a laugh that puckered his face, showed the whitest of teeth, and swept every sign of trouble from the half-globe of his radiant countenance.

"Then you know sum and substance of what I can do for you, Mr. Drew: I can sympathise with you; not a whit more or less am I capable of. I am the merest beginner and dabbler in doing right myself, and have more need to ask you to teach me than to set up for teaching you."

"That's the beauty of you!—excuse me, sir," cried the draper triumphantly. "You don't pretend to teach us anything, but you make us so uncomfortable that we go about ever after asking ourselves what we ought to do. Till last Sunday I had always looked upon myself as an honest man; let me see, it would be more correct to say I looked on myself as a man *quite honest enough*. That I do not feel so now is your doing, sir. You said in your sermon last Sunday, and specially to business men, 'Do you do to your neighbour as you would have your neighbour do to you? If not, how can you suppose that the Lord of Christians will acknowledge you as a disciple of his, that is, as a Christian?' Now, I was even surer of being a Christian than of being an

honest man. You will hardly believe it, and what to think of it myself I hardly know, but I had satisfied myself, more or less, that I had gone through all the necessary stages of being born again, and it is now many years since I was received into a Christian church—dissenting, of course, I mean ; for what I count the most important difference after all between church and dissent is that the one, right or wrong, requires for communion a personal profession of faith and credible proof of conversion—which I believed I gave them, and have been for years, I shame to say it, one of the deacons of that community. But it shall not be for long. To return to my story, however : I was indignant at being called upon from a church-pulpit to raise in myself the question whether or not I was a Christian ; for had not I put my faith in the ———? But I will avoid theology, for I have paid more regard to that than has proved good for me. Suffice it to say that I was now driven from the tests of the theologians to try myself by the words of the Master—he must be the best theologian after all, mustn't he, sir ?—and so there and then I tried the test of doing to your neighbour *as*. But I could *not* get it to work ; I could not see how to use it, and while I was trying how to make it apply you were gone, and I lost all the rest of the sermon.

" Now, whether it was anything you had said coming back to me I cannot tell, but next day, that was yesterday, all at once, in the shop here, as I was serving Mrs. Ramshorn, the thought came to me, How would Jesus Christ have done if he had been a draper instead of a carpenter ? When she was gone, I went up to my room to think about it. And there it seemed that first I must know how he did as a carpenter. But that we are told nothing about. I could get no light upon that. And so my thoughts turned again to the original question, How would he have done had he been a draper ? And, strange to say, I seemed to know far more about that than the other, and to have something to go upon. In fact, I had a sharp and decisive answer concerning several things of which I had dared to make a question."

"The vision of the ideal woke the ideal in yourself," said Wingfold thoughtfully.

"I don't know that I quite understand that," returned Mr. Drew; "but the more I thought the more dissatisfied I became. And, in a word, it has come to this, that I must set things right or give up business."

"That would be no victory," remarked the curate.

"I know it, and shall not yield without a struggle, I promise you. That same afternoon, taking the opportunity of having overheard one of them endeavouring to persuade an old farmer's wife to her disadvantage, I called all my people, and told them that if ever I heard one of them do such a thing, I would turn him or her away at once. But when I came to look at it, I saw how difficult it would be to convict of the breach of such a vague law; and unfortunately, too, I had some time ago introduced the system of a small percentage to the sellers, making it their interest to force sales. That, however, is easily rectified, and I shall see to it at once. But I do wish I had a more definite law to follow than that of doing *as I*."

"Would not more light inside do as well as clearer law outside?" suggested Wingfold.

"How can I tell till I have had a chance of trying?" returned the draper with a smile, which speedily vanished as he went on: "Then, again, there's all about profits! How much ought I to take? Am I to do as others do, and always be ruled by the market? Am I bound to give my customers the advantage of any special bargain I may have made? And then again—for I do a large wholesale business with the little country shops—if I learn that one of my customers is going down-hill, have I or have I not a right to pounce upon him and make him pay me, to the detriment of his other creditors? There's no end of questions, you see, sir."

"I am the worst possible man to ask," returned Wingfold again. "I might, from very ignorance, judge that wrong which is really right, or that right which is really wrong. But one thing I begin to see, that before a man can do right by his neighbour, he must love him as himself. Only I am

such a poor scholar in these high things that, as you have just said, I cannot pretend to teach anybody. That sermon was but an appeal to men's own consciences whether they kept the words of the Lord by whose name they called themselves. Except in your case, Mr. Drew, I am not aware that one of the congregation has taken it to heart."

"I am not sure of that," returned the draper. "Some talk among my own people has made me fancy that, perhaps, though talk be but froth, the froth may rise from some hot work down below. Never man could tell from the quiet way I am talking to you how much I have felt in these few days past."

Wingfold looked him in the face: the earnestness of the man was plain in his eyes, and his resolve stamped on every feature. The curate thought of Zacchæus; thought of Matthew at the receipt of custom; thought with some shame of certain judgments concerning trade, and shopkeepers especially, that seemed somehow to have bred in him like creeping things; for whence they had come he could not tell.

Now it was clear as day that—always provided the man Christ Jesus can be and is with his disciples always to the end of the world—a tradesman might just as soon have Jesus behind the counter with him, teaching him to buy and sell *in his name*, that is, as he would have done it as an earl riding over his lands might have him with him, teaching him how to treat his farmers and cottagers—all depending on how the one did his trading and the other his earling. A mere truism, is it? Yes, it is, and more is the pity; for what is a truism, as most men count truisms? What is it but a truth that ought to have been buried long ago in the lives of men—to send up for ever the corn of true deeds and the wine of loving-kindness—but, instead of being buried in friendly soil, is allowed to lie about, kicked hither and thither in the dry and empty garret of their brains, till they are sick of the sight and sound of it, and, to be rid of the thought of it, declare it to be no living truth but only a lifeless truism! Yet in their brain that truism must rattle until

they shift it to its rightful quarters in their heart, where it will rattle no longer but take root and be a strength and loveliness. Is a truth to cease to be uttered because no better form than that of some divine truism—say of St. John Boanerges—can be found for it? To the critic the truism is a sea-worn, foot-trodden pebble; to the obedient scholar, a radiant topaz, which, as he polishes it with the dust of its use, may turn into a diamond.

"Jesus buying and selling!" said Wingfold to himself. "And why not? Did Jesus make chairs and tables, or boats perhaps, which the people of Nazareth wanted, without any admixture of trade in the matter? Was there no transaction? No passing of money between hands? Did they not pay his father for them? Was his Father's way of keeping things going in the world too vile for the hands of him whose being was delight in the will of that Father? No; there must be a way of handling money that is noble as the handling of the sword in the hands of the patriot. Neither the mean man who loves it nor the faithless man who despises it knows how to handle it. The former is one who allows his dog to become a nuisance, the latter one who kicks him from his sight. The noble man is he who so truly does the work given him to do that the inherent nobility of that work is manifest. And the trader who trades nobly is nobler surely than the high-born who, if he carried the principles of his daily life into trade, would be as pitiful a sneak as any he that bows and scrapes falsely behind that altar of lies, his counter."—All flat truisms I know, but no longer such to Wingfold, to whom they now for the first time showed themselves truths.

He had taken a kindly leave of the draper, promising to call again soon, and had reached the room-door on his way out, when he turned suddenly and said,

"Did you think to try praying, Mr. Drew? Men whose minds, if I may venture to judge, seem to me, from their writings, of the very highest order, have really and positively believed that the loftiest activity of a man's being lay in prayer to the unknown Father of that being, and that light

in the inward parts was the certain consequence ; that, in very truth, not only did the prayer of the man find the ear of God, but the man himself found God himself. I have no right to an opinion, but I have a splendid hope that I shall one day find it true. The Lord said a man must go on praying and not lose heart."

With the words he walked out, and the deacon thought of his many prayers at prayer-meetings and family worships. The words of a young man who seemed to have only just discovered that there was such a thing as prayer, who could not pretend to be sure about it, but hoped splendidly, made him ashamed of them all.

CHAPTER XL.

RACHEL.

WINGFOLD went straight to his friend Polwarth, and asked him if he would allow him to bring Mr. Drew some evening to tea.

"You mean the linen-draper?" asked Polwarth. "Certainly, if you wish it."

"Some troubles are catching," said the curate. "Drew has caught my disease."

"I am delighted to hear it. It would be hard to catch a better, and it's one a rich man, as they say he is, seldom does catch. But I always liked his round, good-humoured, honest face. If I remember rightly, he had a sore trial in his wife. It is generally understood that she ran away with some fellow or other. But that was before he came to live in Glaston.—Would you mind looking in upon Rachel for a few minutes, sir? She is not so well to-day, and has not been out of her own room."

"With all my heart," answered Wingfold. "I am sorry to hear she is suffering."

"She is always suffering more or less," said the little man. "But she enjoys life, notwithstanding, as you may clearly see. It is to her only a mitigated good, and that, I trust, for the sake of an unmitigated one.—Come this way, sir."

He led the curate to the room next his own.

It also was a humble little garret, but dainty with white-

ness. One who did not thoroughly know her might have said it was like her life, colourless, but bright with innocence and peace. The walls were white; the boards of the uncarpeted floor were as white as scrubbing could make old deal; the curtains of windows and bed were whiteness itself; the coverlid was white; so was the face that looked smiling over the top of it from the one low white pillow. But although Wingfold knew that face so well, he was almost startled at the sight of it now; in the patience of its suffering it was positively lovely. All that was painful to see was hidden; the crooked little body lay at rest in the grave of the bedclothes; the soul rose from it, and looked, gracious with womanhood, in the eyes of the curate.

"I cannot give you my hand," she said, smiling, as he went softly towards her, feeling like Moses when he put off his shoes, "for I have such a pain in my arm, I cannot well raise it."

The curate bowed reverentially, seated himself in a chair by her bedside, and, like a true comforter, said nothing.

"Don't be sorry for me, Mr. Wingfold," said her sweet voice at length. "The poor dwarfie, as the children call me, is not a creature to be pitied. You don't know how happy I am as I lie here, knowing my uncle is in the next room, and will come the moment I call him—and that there is one nearer still," she added in a lower voice, almost in a whisper, "whom I haven't even to call. I am his, and he shall do with me just as he likes. I fancy sometimes, when I have to lie still, that I am a little sheep, tied hands and feet—I should have said all four feet, if I am a sheep"—and here she gave a little merry laugh—"lying on an altar—the bed here—burning away in the flame of life that consumes the deathful body—burning, heart and soul and sense, up to the great Father.—Forgive me, Mr. Wingfold, for talking about myself, but you looked so miserable! and I knew it was your kind heart feeling for me. But I need not, for that, have gone on at such a rate. I am ashamed of myself!"

"On the contrary, I am exceedingly obliged to you for honouring me by talking so freely," said Wingfold. "It is

a great satisfaction to find that suffering is not necessarily unhappiness. I could be well content to suffer also, Miss Polwarth, if with the suffering I might have the same peace."

"Sometimes I am troubled," she answered; "but generally I am in peace, and sometimes too happy to dare speak about it. Would the persons you and my uncle were talking about the other day—would they say all my pleasant as well as my painful thoughts came from the same cause—vibrations in my brain?"

"No doubt. They would say, I presume, that the pleasant thoughts come from regular, and the unpleasant from irregular, motions of its particles. They must give the same origin to both. Would you be willing to acknowledge that only your pleasant thoughts had a higher origin, and that your painful ones came from physical sources?"

Because of a headache and depression of spirits, Wingfold had been turning over similar questions in his own mind the night before.

"I see," said the dwarfie, "I see. No. There are sad thoughts sometimes which in their season I would not lose, for I would have their influences with me always. In their season they are better than a host of happy ones, and there is joy at the root of all. But if they did come from physical causes, would it follow that they did not come from God? Is he not the God of the dying as well as the God of the living?"

"If there be a God, Miss Polwarth," returned Wingfold eagerly, "then is he God everywhere, and not a maggot can die any more than a Shakespeare be born without him. He is either enough, that is, all in all, or he is not at all."

"That is what I think, because it is best. I can give no better reason."

"If there be a God, there can be no better reason," said Wingfold.

This *if* of Wingfold's was, I need hardly now say, an *if* of bare honesty, and came of no desire to shake an unthinking confidence. Neither, had it been of the other sort, could it

have shaken Rachel's, for her confidence was full of thinking. As little could it shock her, for she hardly missed a sentence that passed between her uncle and his new friend. She made no reply, never imagining it her business to combat the doubts of a man whom she knew to be eager after the truth, and being guiltless of any tendency, because she believed, to condemn doubt as wicked.

A short silence followed.

"How delightful it must be to feel well and strong!" said Rachel at length. "I can't help often thinking of Miss Lingard. It's always Miss Lingard comes up to me when I think of such things! Oh! ain't she beautiful and strong, Mr. Wingfold?—and sits on her horse as straight as a rush! It does one good to see her. Just fancy me on a great tall horse! What a bag of potatoes I should look!"

She burst into a merry laugh, and then came a few tears, which were not all of the merriment of which she let them pass as the consequence, remarking, as she wiped them away,

"But no one can tell, Mr. Wingfold—and I'm sure Miss Lingard would be astonished to hear—what pleasure I have while lying unable to move. I suppose I benefit by what people call the law of compensation! How I hate the word! As if *that* was the way the Father of Jesus Christ did, and not his very best, to get his children, elder brothers and prodigal sons, home to his heart!—You heard what my uncle said about dreams the other day?" she resumed after a little pause.

"Yes. I thought it very sensible," replied the curate.

"It all depends on the sort, don't it?" said Rachel. "Some of mine I would not give for a library. They make me grow, telling me things I should never learn otherwise. I don't mean any rubbish about future events, and such like. Of all useless things a knowledge of the future seems to me the most useless, for what are you to do with a thing before it exists? Such a knowledge could only bewilder you as to the right way to take—would make you see double instead of single. That's not the sort I mean at all. You won't laugh at me, Mr. Wingfold?"

"I can scarcely imagine anything less likely."

"Then I don't mind opening my toy-box to you. In my dreams, for instance, I am sometimes visited by such a sense of freedom as fills me with a pure bliss unknown to my waking thoughts except as a rosy cloud on the horizon. As if they were some heavenly corporation, my dreams present me, not with the freedom of some poor little city like London, but with the freedom of all space."

The curate sat and listened with wonder, but with no sense of unfitness: such speech and such thought suited well with the face that looked up from the low pillow with its lovely eyes; for lovely they were with a light that had both flash and force.

"I don't believe," she went on, "that even Miss Lingard has more of the blessed sense of freedom and strength and motion when she is on horseback than I have when I am asleep. The very winds of my dreams will make me so unspeakably happy that I wake weeping. Do not tell me it is gone then, for I continue so happy that I can hardly get to sleep again to hunt for more joy. Don't say it is an unreality—for where does freedom lie? In the body or in the mind? What does it matter whether my body be lying still or moving from one spot of space to another? What is the good of motion but to produce the feeling of freedom? The feeling is everything; and if I have it, that is all that I want. Bodily motion would indeed disturb it for me—lay fetters on my spirit.—Sometimes, again, I dream of a new flower—one never before beheld by mortal eye—with some strange, wonderful quality in it, perhaps, that makes it a treasure, like that flower of Milton's invention—haemony—in Comus, you know. But one curious thing is that that strange quality will never be recalled in waking hours; so that what it was I can never tell—as if it belonged to other regions than the life of this world—I retain only the vaguest memory of its power and marvel and preciousness.—Sometimes it is a little poem or a song I dream of, or some strange musical instrument, perhaps like one of those I have seen angels with in a photograph from an old picture.

And somehow with the instrument always comes the knowledge of how to play upon it. So you see, sir, as it has pleased God to send me into the world as crooked as a crab, and nearly as lame as a seal, it has pleased him also to give me the health and the riches of the night to strengthen me for the pains and poverties of the day.—You rejoice in a beautiful thought when it comes to you, Mr. Wingfold, do you not?"

"When it comes to me," answered Wingfold significantly, almost petulantly. Could it be that he envied the dwarf-girl?

"Then is the thought any worse because it comes in a shape? or is the feeling less of a feeling that it is born in a dream?"

"I need no convincing. I admit all you say," returned Wingfold.

"Why are you so silent, then? You make me think you are objecting inside to everything I am saying," rejoined Rachel with a smile.

"Partly because I fear you are exciting yourself too much and will suffer in consequence," answered the curate, who had noted the rosy flush on her face.

The same moment her uncle re-entered the room.

"I have been trying to convince Mr. Wingfold that there *may* be some good in dreaming, uncle," she said.

"Successfully?" asked Polwarth.

"Unnecessarily," interjected Wingfold. "I required for conviction only the facts. Why should I suppose that, if there be a God, he is driven out of us by sleep?"

"It is an awful thing," said Polwarth, "to think that this feeble individuality of ours, the offspring of God's individuality, should have some power, and even more will than power, to close its door against him, and keep house without him!"

"But what sort of a house?" murmured Wingfold.

"Yes, uncle," said Rachel; "but think how he keeps about us, haunting the doors and windows like the very wind, watching to get in? And sometimes he makes of himself a tempest, that both doors and windows fly open, and he enters in fear and dismay."

The prophetic in the uncle was the poetic in the niece.

"For you and me, uncle," she went on, "he made the doors and windows so rickety that they *could* not keep him out."

"Ye are the temples of the Holy Ghost," said the curate, almost unconsciously.

"Ain't we funny temples!" rejoined the girl.

So full was her soul of a lively devotion that she took the liberties of a child of the house with sacred things.

"But, Mr. Wingfold," she continued, "I must tell you one more curious thing about my dreams: I *never* dream of being crooked and dwarfish. I don't dream that I am straight either; I suppose I feel all right, and therefore never think about it. That makes me fancy my soul must be straight. Don't you think so, sir?"

"Indeed I do," said Wingfold warmly.

"I am afraid I shall be telling you some of my dreams some day."

"We are rather given to that weakness," said Polwarth, "so much so as to make me fear for our brains sometimes. But a crooked rose-tree may yet bear a good rose."

"Ah! you are thinking of my poor father, uncle, I know," said Rachel." His was a straight stem and a fine rose, only overblown, perhaps. I don't think I need be much afraid of that, for if I were to go out of my mind, I should not have strength to live—except, indeed, I knew God through all the madness. I think my father did in a way."

"It was quite plain he did," answered her uncle, "and that in no feeble way either. Some day I must tell you"—here he turned to Wingfold—"about that brother of mine, Rachel's father. I should even like to show you a manuscript he left behind him—surely one of the strangest ever written! It would be well worth printing if that would insure its falling into the hands of those who could read through the madness. —But we have talked quite long enough for your head, child: I will take Mr. Wingfold into the next room."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE BUTTERFLY.

AS Wingfold walked home that afternoon, he thought much of what he had heard and seen. "If there be a God," he said to himself, "then all is well, for certainly he would not give being to such a woman, and then throw her aside as a failure and forget her. It is strange to see, though, how he permits his work to be thwarted. To be the perfect God notwithstanding, he must be able to turn the very thwarting to higher furtherance. Don't we see something of the sort in life—the vigorous nursed by the arduous? Is it presumptuous to imagine God saying to Rachel, 'Trust me and bear, and I will do better for thee than thou canst think'? Certainly the one who most needs the comfort of such a faith, in this case *has* it. I wish I could be as sure of him as Rachel Polwarth! But then," he added, smiling to himself, "she has had her crooked spine to help her! It seems as if nothing less than the spiritual beholding of the Eternal will enable at least absolute belief. And till then what better or indeed other proof can the less receive of the presence of the greater than the expansion of its own being under the influences of that greater? But my plague now is that the ideas of religion are so grand, and the things all around it in life so commonplace, that they give the lie to each other

from morning to night—in my mind, I mean. Which is the true; a loving, caring father, or the grinding of cruel poverty and the naked exposure to heedless chance? How is it that, while the former seems the only right reasonable, and all-sufficing thing, it should yet come more naturally to believe in the latter? And yet, when I think of it, I never did come closer to believing in the matter than is indicated by terror of its possible truth—so many things looked like it. Then what has nature in common with the Bible and its metaphysics?—There I am wrong: she has a thousand things. The very wind on my face seems to rouse me to fresh effort after a pure, healthy life! Then there is the sunrise! There is the snowdrop in the snow! There is the butterfly! There is the rain of summer, and the clearing of the sky after a storm! There is the hen gathering her chickens under her wing! I begin to doubt whether there be the commonplace anywhere except in our own mistrusting nature, that will cast no care upon the Unseen. It is with me in regard to my better life as it was with the diciples in regard to their bodily life, when they were for the time rendered incapable of understanding the words of our Lord by having forgotten to take bread in the boat: they were so afraid of being hungry that they could think of nothing but bread."

Such were some of the curate's thoughts as he walked home, and they drove him to prayer, in which came more thoughts. When he reached his room he sat down at his table, and wove and knotted and pieced together the following verses, venturing that easy yet perilous thing, a sonnet. I give here its final shape, not its first or second:

Methought I floated sightless, nor did know
That I had ears until I heard the cry
As of a mighty man in agony:
"How long, Lord, shall I lie thus foul and slow?
The arrows of thy lightning through me go,
And sting and torture me—yet here I lie
A shapeless mass that scarce can mould a sigh"
The darkness thinned; I saw a thing below,
Like sheeted corpse, a knot at head and feet.
Slow clomb the sun the mountains of the dead,

And looked upon the world : the silence broke !
A blinding struggle ! then the thunderous beat
Of great exulting pinions stroke on stroke !
And from that world a mighty angel fled.

But upon the heels of the sonnet came, as was natural, according to the law of reaction, a fresh and more appalling, because more self-assertive and verisimilous, invasion of the commonplace. What a foolish, unreal thing he had written ! He caught up his hat and stick and hurried out, thinking to combat the demon better in the open air.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE COMMONPLACE.

IT was evening, and the air was still and warm. Pine street was almost empty save of the red sun, which blinded him so that wherever he looked he could only see great sun-blots. All but a few of the shops were closed, but among the few he was surprised to find that of his friend the linen-draper, who had always been a strong advocate of early closing. The shutters were up, however, though the door stood wide open. He peeped in. To his sun-blinded eyes the shop looked very dark, but he thought he saw Mr. Drew talking to some one, and entered. He was right : it was the draper himself and a poor woman with a child on one arm, and a print dress she had just bought on the other. The curate leaned against the counter, and waited until business should be over to address his friend.

"Is Mr. Drew an embryonic angel?" he half felt, half thought with himself. "Is this shop the chrysalis of a great psyche? Will the draper, with his round, good-humoured face and puckering smile, ever spread thunderous wings and cleave the air up to the throne of God?"

"I cannot tell you how it goes against me to take that woman's money," said the voice of the draper.

The curate woke up to the presence of the unwinged, and saw that the woman had left the shop.

"I did let her have the print at cost price," Mr. Drew went on, laughing merrily. "That was all I could venture on."

"Where was the danger?"

"Ah, you don't know so well as I do the good of having some difficulty in getting what you need! To ease the struggles of the poor, except it be in sickness or absolute want, I have repeatedly proved to be a cruel kindness."

"Then you don't sell to the poor women at cost price always?"

"No; only to the soldiers' wives. They have a very hard life of it, poor things."

"That is your custom, then?"

"For the last ten years. But I don't let them know it."

"Is it for the soldiers' wives you keep your shop open so late? I thought you were the great supporter of early closing in Glaston," said the curate.

"I will tell you how it happened to-night," answered the draper, and as he spoke he turned round, not his long left ear upon the pivot of his skull, but his whole person upon the pivot of the counter—to misuse the word pivot with Wordsworth—and bolted the shop-door.

"After the young men had put up the shutters and were gone," he said, returning to the counter, "leaving me as usual to bolt the door, I fell a-thinking. Outside, the street was full of sunlight, but only enough came in to show how gloomy the place was without more of it, and the back of the shop was nearly dark. It was very still, too—so still that the silence seemed to have taken the shape of gloom. Pardon me for talking in this unbusiness-like way: a man can't be a draper always; he must be foolish sometimes. Thirty years ago I used to read Tennyson. I believe I was among the earliest of his admirers."

"Foolish!" echoed Wingfold, thoughtfully.

"You see," the draper went on, "there *is* something solemn in the quiet after business is over. Sometimes it's more so, sometimes less; but this night it came upon me that the shop felt like a chapel—had the very air of one,

somehow, and so I fell a-thinking, and forgot to shut the door. How I began I don't know, but my past life came up to me, and I remembered how, when I was a young man, I used to despise my father's business to which he was bringing me up, and feed my fancy with things belonging to higher walks in life. Then I saw that must have been partly how I fell into the mistake of marrying Mrs. Drew. She was the daughter of a doctor in our town, a widower. He was in poor health, and unable to make much of his practice, so that when he died she was left destitute, and for that reason alone, I do believe, accepted me. What followed you know; she went away with a man who used to travel for a large Manchester house. I have never heard of her since.

"After she left me, a sort of something which I think I may call the disease of self-preservation laid hold upon me. I must acknowledge that the loss of my wife was not altogether a misery. She despised my trade, which drove me to defend it—and the more bitterly that I also despised it. There was, therefore, a good deal of strife between us. I did not make allowance enough for the descent she had made from a professional father to a trader-husband. I forgot that, if she was to blame for marrying me for bread, I was to blame for marrying her to enlarge myself with her superiority. After she was gone I was aware of a not unwelcome calm in the house, and in the emptiness of that calm came the demon of selfishness sevenfold into my heart, and took up his abode with me. From that time I busied myself only about two things—the safety of my soul and a good provision for my body. I joined the church I had occasion to mention to you before, sir, grew a little harder in my business dealings, and began to lay by money. And so, ever since, have I been going on till I heard your sermon the other day, which I hope has waked me up to something better. All this long story is but to let you understand how I was feeling when that woman came into the shop. I told you how, in the dusk and the silence, it was as if I were in the chapel. I found myself half listening for the organ.

Then the verse of a hymn came into my mind—I can't tell where or when I had met with it, but it stuck to me :

> " 'Let me stand ever at the door
> And keep it from the entering sin,
> That so thy temple, walls and floor,
> Be pure for thee to enter in.'

Now that, you see, is said of the temple of the heart ; but somehow things went rather cross-cut this evening—they got muddled in my head. It seemed as if I was the door-keeper of my shop, and at the same time as if my shop, spreading out and dimly vanishing in the sacred gloom, was the temple of the Holy Ghost, out of which I had to keep the sin. And with the thought a great awe fell upon me : could it be—might it not be that God was actually in the place ? that in the silence he was thinking—in the gloom he was knowing ? I laid myself over the counter, with my face in my hands, and went on half thinking, half praying. All at once the desire rose burning in my heart, Would to God my house were in truth a holy place, haunted by his presence ! 'And wherefore not ?' rejoiced something within me—heart or brain or something deeper than either. 'Is thy work unholy ? Are thy deeds base ? Is thy buying or selling dishonest ? Is it all for thyself and nothing for thy fellows ? Is it not a lawful calling ? Is it or is it not of God ? If it be of God, and yet he be not present, then surely thy lawful calling thou followest unlawfully !' So there I was—brought back to the old story. And I said to myself, 'God knows I want to follow it lawfully. Am I not even now seeking how to do so ?' But this, though true, did not satisfy me. To follow it lawfully—even in his sight —no longer seemed enough. Was there then no possibility of raising it to dignity ? Did the business of Zaccheus remain, after the visit of Jesus, a contemptible one still ? Could not mine be made Christian ? Was there no corner in the temple where a man might buy and sell and not be driven out by the whip of small cords ? I heard a step in the shop, and lifting my head, saw a poor woman with a

child in her arms. Annoyed at being found in that posture, like one drunk or in despair; annoyed also with myself for not having shut the door, with my usual first tendency to injustice a harsh word was trembling on my very lips, when suddenly something made me look round in a kind of maze on the dusky back-shop. A moment more and I understood: God was waiting to see what truth was in my words. That is just how I felt it, and I hope I am not irreverent in saying so. Then I saw that the poor woman looked frightened—I suppose at my looks and gestures; perhaps she thought me out of my mind. I made haste and received her, and listened to her errand as if she had been a duchess—say rather an angel of God, for such I felt her in my heart to be. She wanted a bit of dark print with a particular kind of spot in it, which she had seen in the shop some months before but had not been able to buy. I turned over everything we had, and was nearly in despair. At last, however, I found the very piece which had ever since haunted her fancy—just enough of it left for a dress! But all the time I sought it I felt as if I were doing God service—or at least doing something he wanted me to do. It sounds almost ludicrous now, but—"

"God forbid!" said Wingfold.

"I'm glad you don't think so, sir. I was afraid you would."

"Had the thing been a trifle, I should still have said the same," returned the curate. "But who with any heart would call it a trifle to please the fancy of a poor woman, one who is probably far oftener vexed than pleased? She had been brooding over this dress; you took trouble to content her with her desire. Who knows what it may do for the growth of the woman! I know what you've done for me by the story of it!"

"She did walk out pleased-like!" said the draper, "and left me more pleased than she—and so grateful to her for coming, you can't think!"

"I begin to suspect," said the curate, after a pause, "that the common transactions of life are the most sacred channels

for the spread of the heavenly leaven. There was ten times more of the divine in selling her that gown as you did, in the name of God, than in taking her into your pew and singing out of the same hymn-book with her."

"I should be glad to do that next, though, if I had the chance," said Mr. Drew. "You must not think, because he has done me so little good, that our minister is not a faithful preacher; and, owing you more than heart can tell, sir, I like chapel better than church, and consider it nearer the right way. I don't mean to be a turncoat and leave Drake for you, sir. I must give up my deaconship, but I won't my pew or my subscription."

"Quite right, Mr. Drew!" said Wingfold. "That could do nothing but harm. I have just been reading what our Lord says about proselytising. Good-night."

CHAPTER XLIII.

HOME AGAIN.

THE curate had entered the draper's shop in the full blaze of sunset, but the demon of unbelief sat on his shoulders: he could get no nearer his heart, but that was enough to make of the "majestical roof fretted with golden fire . . . . a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours." When he left the shop, the sun was far below the horizon, and the glory had faded out of the west; but the demon had fled, and the brown feathers of the twilight were beautiful as the wings of the silver dove sprung heavenwards from among the pots. And as he went he reasoned with himself: "Either there is a God, and that God the perfect heart of truth and loveliness, or all poetry and art is but an unsown, unplanted, rootless flower crowning a somewhat symmetrical heap of stones. The man who sees no beauty in its petals, finds no perfume in its breath, may well accord it the parentage of the stones; the man whose heart swells beholding it, will be ready to think it has roots that reach below them." The curate's search, it will be remarked, had already widened greatly the sphere of his doubts; but the larger the field the greater the chance of finding a marl-pit; and if there be such a thing as truth, every fresh doubt is yet another finger-post pointing towards its dwelling. So talked the curate to himself, and, full in the face, rounding the corner of a street, met George Bascombe.

The young barrister held out his large hospitable hand at the full length of his arm, and spread abroad his wide chest to greet him, and they went through the ceremony of shaking hands—which, even in their case, I cannot judge so degrading and hypocritical as the Latin nations seem to consider it. Then Wingfold had the first word.

"I have not yet had an opportunity of thanking you for the great service you have done me," he said.

"I am glad to know I have such an honour; but—"

"I mean in opening my eyes to my true position."

"Ah, my dear fellow! I was sure you only required to have your attention turned in the right direction. When—ah!—I—I was on the verge of committing the solecism of asking when you thought of resigning! Ha! ha!"

"Not yet," replied Wingfold to the question thus at once withdrawn and put. "The more I look into the matter, the more reason I find for hoping it may be possible for me to—to keep the appointment."

"Oh!"

"The further I inquire, the more am I convinced that if not in a certain portion of what the church teaches, then nowhere else, and assuredly not in what you teach, shall I find anything by which life can either account for or justify itself."

"But if what you find is not true!" cried George, with a burst of semi-grand indignation.

"But if what I find should be true, even though you should never be able to see it!" returned the curate.

And as if disjected by an explosion between them, the two men were ten paces asunder, each hurrying his own way.

"If I can't prove there is a God," said Wingfold to himself, "as little surely can he prove there is none!"

But then came the thought, "The fellow will say that, there being no sign of a God, the burden of proof lies with me."

And therewith he saw how useless it would be to discuss the question with any one who, not seeing him, had no desire to see him.

"No!" he said, "my business is not to prove to any other man that there is a God, but to find him for myself. If I should find him, then will be time enough to think of showing him."

And with that his thoughts turned from Bascombe and went back to the draper. When he reached home he took out his sonnet, but after working at it for a little while, he found that he must ease his heart by writing another. Here it is:

> Methought that in a solemn church I stood.
> Its marble acres, worn with knees and feet,
> Lay spread from door to door, from street to street.
> Midway the form hung high upon the road
> Of Him who gave his life to be our good;
> Beyond, priests flitted, bowed, and murmured meet
> Among the candles shining still and sweet.
> Men came and went, and worshipped as they could,
> And still their dust a woman with her broom,
> Bowed to her work, kept sweeping to the door,
> Then saw I, slow through all the pillared gloom,
> Across the church a silent figure come:
> "Daughter," it said, "thou sweepest well my floor!"
> It is the Lord, I cried, and saw no more.

I suppose if one could so stop the throat of the blossom-buried nightingale that, though he might breathe at will, he could no longer sing, he would drop from his bough, and die of suppressed song. Perhaps some men so die; I do not know: it were better than to live and bore their friends with the insuppressible! But however this may be, the man who can utter himself to his own joy in any of the forms of human expression, let him give thanks to God; and if he give not his verses to the printer, he will probably have cause to give thanks again. To the man's self the utterance is, not the less, invaluable. And so Wingfold found it.

He went out again and into the churchyard, where he sat down on a stone.

"How strange," he said to himself, "that out of faith should have sprung that stone church. A poor little poem now and then is all that stands for mine!—all that shows, that is. But my heart does sometimes burn within me! If only I could be sure they were *his* words that set it burning!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE SHEATH.

"MR. WINGFOLD," said Polwarth one evening, the usual salutations over, taking what he commonly left to his friend—the initiative,—"I want to tell you something I don't wish even Rachel to hear."

He led the way to his room, and the curate followed. Seated there, in the shadowy old attic, through the very walls of which the ivy grew, and into which, by the open window in the gable, from the infinite west blew the evening air, carrying with it the precious scent of honeysuckle to mingle with that of old books, Polwarth recounted and Wingfold listened to a strange adventure. The trees hid the sky, and the little human nest was dark around them.

"I am going to make a confidant of you, Mr. Wingfold," said the dwarf, with troubled face and almost whispered word. "You will know how much I have already learned to trust you when I say that what I am about to confide to you plainly involves the secret of another."

His large face grew paler as he spoke, and something almost like fear grew in his eyes, but they looked straight into those of the curate, and his voice did not tremble.

"One night, some weeks ago—I can, if necessary, make myself certain of the date,—I was—no uncommon thing with me—unable to sleep. Sometimes, when such is my case, I

lie as still and happy as any bird under the wing of its mother; at other times I must get up and go out: for I take longings for air almost as a drunkard for wine, and that night nothing would serve my poor imprisoned soul but more air through the bars of its lungs. I rose, dressed, and went out.

"It was a still, warm night, no moon, but plenty of starlight, the wind blowing as now, gentle and sweet and cool—just the wind my lungs sighed for. I got into the open park, avoiding the trees, and wandered on and on, without thinking where I was going. The turf was soft under my feet, the dusk soft to my eyes, and the wind to my soul; I had breath and room and leisure and silence and loneliness, and everything to make me more than usually happy; and so I wandered on and on, neither caring nor looking whither I went: so long as the stars remained unclouded I could find my way back when I pleased.

"I had been out perhaps an hour, when through the soft air came a cry, apparently from far off. There was something in the tone that seemed to me unusually frightful. The bare sound made me shudder before I had time to say to myself it was a cry. I turned my face in the direction of it, so far as I could judge, and went on. I cannot run, for if I attempt it I am in a moment unable even to walk—from palpitation and choking.

"I had not gone very far before I found myself approaching the hollow where stands the old house of Glaston, uninhabited for twenty years. Was it possible, I thought, that the cry came from the house, and had, therefore, sounded farther off than it was! I stood and listened for a moment, but all seemed still as the grave. I must go in, and see whether any one was there in want of help. You may well smile at the idea of my helping any one, for what could I do if it came to a struggle?"

"On the contrary," interrupted Wingfold, "I was smiling with admiration of your pluck."

"At least," resumed Polwarth, "I have this advantage over some, that I cannot be fooled with the fancy that this

poor miserable body of mine is worth thinking of beside the smallest suspicion of duty. What is it but a cracked jug? So down the slope I went, got into the garden, and made my way through the tangled bushes to the house. I knew the place perfectly, for I had often wandered all over it, sometimes spending hours there.

"Before I reached the door, however, I heard some one behind me in the garden, and instantly stepped into a thicket of gooseberry and currant bushes. It is sometimes an advantage to be little: the moment I stepped aside I was hidden. That same moment the night seemed rent in twain by a most hideous cry from the house. Ere I could breathe again after it, the tall figure of a woman rushed past me, tearing its way through the bushes towards the door. I followed instantly, saw her run up the steps, and heard her open and shut the door. I opened it as quietly as I could, but just as I stepped into the dark hall came a third fearful cry, through the echoes of which in the empty house I heard the rush of hurried feet and trailing garments on the stair. As I say, I knew the house quite well, but my perturbation had so muddled the idea of it in my brain, that for a few seconds I had to consider how it lay. The moment I recalled its plan, I made what haste I could, reached the top of the stair, and was hesitating which way to turn, when once more came the fearful cry, and set me trembling from head to foot. I cannot describe the horror of it. It was as the cry of a soul in torture—unlike any sound of the human voice I had ever before heard. I shudder now at the recollection of it as it echoed through the house, clinging to the walls and driven along. I was hurrying I knew not whither, for I had again lost all notion of the house, when I caught a glimpse of a light shining from under a door. I approached it softly, and finding that door inside a small closet, knew at once where I was. As I was in office on the ground, and it could hardly be anything righteous that led to such an outcry in the house which, although deserted, was still my master's, I felt justified in searching further into the matter. Laying my ear, therefore, against the door, I heard

what was plainly enough a lady's voice. Right sweet and womanly it was, though full of pain—even agony, I thought, but heroically suppressed. She soothed, she expostulated, she condoled, she coaxed. Mingled with hers was the voice of youth, as it seemed. It was wild, yet so low as sometimes to be all but inaudible, and not a word from either could I distinguish. Hardly the less plain was it, however, that the youth spoke either in delirium or with something terrible on his mind, for his tones were those of one in despair. I stood for a time bewildered, fascinated, terrified. At length I grew convinced somehow that I had no right to be there. Doubtless the man was in hiding, and where a man hides there must be reason; but was it any business of mine? I crept out of the house, and up to the higher ground. There I drew deep breaths of the sweet night air—so pure that it seemed to be washing the world clean for another day's uses. But I had no longer any pleasure in the world. I went straight home, and to bed again—but had brought little repose with me: I must do something, but what? The only result certain to follow was more trouble to the troubled already. Might there not be innocent reasons for the questionable situation? Might not the man have been taken ill, and so suddenly that he could reach no other shelter? And the lady might be his wife, who had gone as soon as she could leave him to find help, but had failed. There *must* be some simple explanation of the matter, however strange it showed! I might, in the morning, be of service to them. And partly comforted by the temporary conclusion, I got a little troubled sleep.

"As soon as I had had a cup of tea, I set out for the old house. I heard the sounds of the workmen's hammers on the new one as I went. All else was silence. The day looked so honest and so clear of conscience that it was difficult to believe the night had shrouded such an awful meeting. Yet, in the broad light of the forenoon, a cold shudder seized me when first I looked down on the slack ridges and broken roofs of the old house. When I got into the garden I began to sing and knock the bushes about, then opened

the door noisily, and clattered about in the hall and the lower rooms before going up the stair. Along every passage and into every room I went, to give good warning ere I approached that in which I had heard the voices. At length I stood at the door of it and knocked. There was no answer. I knocked again. Still no answer. I opened it and peeped in. There was no one there! An old bedstead was all I saw. I searched every corner, but not one trace could I discover of human being having been there, except this behind the bed—and it may have lain there as long as the mattress, which I remember since the first time I ever went into the house."

As he spoke, Polwarth handed to the curate a small leather sheath, which, from its shape, could not have belonged to a pair of scissors, although neither of the men knew any sort of knife it would have fitted.

"Would you mind taking care of it, Mr. Wingfold?" the gate-keeper continued as the curate examined it; "I don't like having it. I can't even bear to think of it in the house, and yet I don't quite care to destroy it."

"I don't in the least mind taking charge of it," answered Wingfold.

Why was it that, as he said so, the face of Helen Lingard rose before his mind's eye as he had now seen it twice in the congregation at the Abbey—pale with an inward trouble, as it seemed, large-eyed and worn—so changed, yet so ennobled? Even then he had felt the deadening effect of its listlessness, and had had to turn away lest it should compel him to feel that he was but talking to the winds, or into a desert where dwelt no voice of human response. Why should he think of her now? Was it that her troubled, pallid face had touched him—had set something near his heart a-trembling, whether with merely human sympathy or with the tenderness of man for suffering woman? Certainly he had never till then thought of her with the slightest interest, and why should she come up to him now? Could it be that— Good heaven! There was her brother ill! And had not Faber said there seemed something unusual about

the character of his illness? What could it mean? It was impossible, of course—but yet—and yet—.

"Do you think," he said, "we are in any way bound to inquire further into the affair?"

"If I had thought so, I should not have left it unmentioned till now," answered Polwarth. "But without being busybodies, we might be prepared in case the thing should unfold itself, and put it in our power to be useful. Meantime I have the relief of the confessional."

CHAPTER XLV.

INVITATION.

AS Wingfold walked back to his lodgings, he found a new element mingling with the varied matter of his previous inquiry. Human suffering laid hold upon him—neither as his own nor as that of humanity, but as that of men and women—known or unknown, it mattered nothing: there were hearts in the world from whose agony broke terrible cries, hearts of which sad faces like that of Miss Lingard were the exponents. Such hearts might be groaning and writhing in any of the houses he passed, and, even if he knew the hearts, and what the vampire that sucked their blood, he could do nothing for their relief. Little indeed could he have imagined the life of such a comfort-guarded lady as Miss Lingard, exposed to the intrusion of any terror-waking monster, from the old ocean of chaos into the quiet flow of its meadow-banked river! And what multitudes must there not be in the world—what multitudes in our island; how many even in Glaston, whose hearts, lacerated by no remorse, overwhelmed by no crushing sense of guilt, yet knew their own bitterness, and had no friend radiant enough to make a sunshine in their shady places! He fell into mournful mood over the troubles of his race. Always a kind-hearted fellow, he had not been used to think about such things; he had had troubles of his own,

and had got through at least some of them ; people must have troubles, else would they grow unendurable for pride and insolence. But now that he had begun to hope he saw a glimmer somewhere afar at the end of the darksome cave in which he had all at once discovered that he was buried alive, he began also to feel how wretched those must be who were groping on without even a hope in their dark eyes.

If he had never committed any crime, he had yet done wrong enough to understand the misery of shame and dishonour, and should he not find a loving human heart the heart of the world, would rejoice—with what rejoicing might then be possible—to accept George Bascombe's theory, and drop into the jaws of darkness and cease. How much more miserable, then, must those be who had committed some terrible crime, or dearly loved one who had ! What relief, what hope, what lightening for them ! What a breeding-nest of vermiculate cares and pains was this human heart of ours ! Oh ! surely it needed some refuge ! If no saviour had yet come, the tortured world of human hearts cried aloud for one with unutterable groaning ! What would Bascombe do if he had committed a murder ? Or what could he do for one who had ? If fable it were, it was at least a need-invented one—that of a Saviour to whom any one might go, at any moment, without a journey, without letters or commendations or credentials ! And yet no : if it had been invented, it could hardly be by any one in the need, for such even now could hardly be brought to believe it. Ill-bested were the world indeed if there were no one beyond whose pardon crime could not go ! Ah ! but where was the good of pardon if still the conscious crime kept stinging ? and who would wish one he loved to grow callous to the crime he had committed ? Could one rejoice that his guilty friend had learned to laugh again, able at length to banish the memory of the foul thing ? Would reviving self-content render him pleasant to the eyes, and his company precious in the wisdom that springs from the knowledge of evil ? Would not that be the moment when he who had most

assiduously sought to comfort him in his remorse, would first be tempted to withdraw his foot from his threshold? But if there was a God—such a God as, according to the Christian story, had sent his own son into the world: had given him to appear among us, clothed in the garb of humanity, the armour that can be pierced, to take all the consequences of being the god of obedience among the children of disobedience, engulfing their wrongs in his infinite forbearance, and winning them back, by slow and unpromising and tedious renewal, to the heart of his father, surely such a God would not have created them knowing that some of them would sin sins from the horror of which in themselves all his devotion could not redeem them! And as he thought thus, the words arose in his mind, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" His heart filled. He pondered over them. When he got home, he sought and found them in the book Did a man ever really utter them? If a man did, either he was the most presumptuous of mortals, or *he could do what he said.* If he could, then to have seen and distrusted that man, Wingfold felt, would have been to destroy in himself the believing faculty and become incapable of trusting for ever after. And such a man must, in virtue of his very innocence, know that the worst weariness and the worst load is evil and crime, and must know himself able, in full righteousness, with no jugglery of oblivion or self-esteem, to take off the heavy load and give rest.

"And yet," thought the curate, not without self-reproach, "for one who will go to him to get the rest, a thousand will ask, *How can he then do it?* As if they should be fit to know!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

A SERMON TO HELEN.

ALL the rest of the week his mind was full of thoughts like these, amidst which ever arose the suffering face of Helen Lingard, bringing with it the still strengthening suspicion that behind it must lay some oppressive, perhaps terrible, secret. But he made no slightest movement towards the discovery of it, put not a single question in any direction for its confirmation or dissolution. He would not look in at her windows, but what seeds of comfort he could find, he would scatter wide, and hope that some of them might fall into her garden.

When he raised his head on the Sunday from kneeling, with heart honest, devout, and neighbourly, in the pulpit before the sermon, and cast his eyes round his congregation, they rested first, for one moment and no more, upon the same pallid and troubled countenance whose reflection had so often of late looked out from the magic mirror of his memory; the next, they flitted across the satisfied, healthy, handsome, clever face of her cousin, behind which plainly sat a conscience well-to-do, in an easy-chair; the third, they saw and fled the peevish autumnal visage of Mrs. Ramshorn; the next, they roved a little, then rested on the draper's good-humoured disk, on the white forehead of which brooded a cloud of thoughtfulness. Last of all they sought the free

seats, and found the faces of both the dwarfs. It was the first time he had seen Rachel's there, and it struck him that it expressed greater suffering than he had read in it before. She ought rather to be in bed than in church, he thought. But the same seemed the case with her uncle's countenance also ; and with that came the conclusion that the pulpit was a wonderful watch-tower whence to study human nature ; that people lay bare more of their real nature and condition to the man in the pulpit than they know—even before the sermon. Their faces had fallen into the shape of their minds, for the church has an isolating as well as congregating power, and no passing emotion moulds them to an evanescent show. When Polwarth spoke to a friend, the suffering melted in issuing radiance ; when he sat thus quiescent, patient endurance was the first thing to be read on his countenance. This flashed through the curate's mind in the moments ere he began to speak, and with it came afresh the feeling—one that is yet ought not to be sad—that no one of all these hearts could give summer weather to another. The tears rose in his eyes as he gazed, and his heart swelled towards his own flesh and blood, as if his spirit would break forth in a torrent of ministering tenderness and comfort. Then he made haste to speak lest he should become unable. As usual his voice trembled at first, but rose into strength as his earnestness found way. This is a good deal like what he said :

" The marvellous man who is reported to have appeared in Palestine, teaching and preaching, seems to have suffered far more from sympathy with the inward sorrows of his race than from pity for their bodily pains. These last could he not have swept from the earth with a word ? and yet it seems to have been mostly, if not indeed always, only in answer to prayer that he healed them, and that for the sake of some deeper, some spiritual healing that should go with the bodily cure. It could not be for the dead man whom he was about to call from the tomb that his tears flowed. What source could they have but compassion and pitiful sympathy for the sorrows of the dead man's sisters and friends who had

not the inward joy that sustained himself, and the thought of all the pains and heartaches of those that looked in the face of death—the moanings of love-torn generations, the blackness of bereavement that had stormed through the ever-changing world of human hearts since first man had been made in the image of his Father? Yet are there far more terrible troubles than his death—which I trust can only part, not keep apart. There is the weight of conscious wrong-being and wrong-doing: that is the gravestone that needs to be rolled away ere a man can rise to life. Call to mind how Jesus used to forgive men's sins, thus lifting from their hearts the crushing load that paralysed all their efforts. Recall the tenderness with which he received those from whom the religious of his day turned aside—the repentant women who wept sore-hearted from very love, the publicans who knew they were despised because they were despicable. With him they sought and found shelter. He was their saviour from the storm of human judgment and the biting frost of public opinion, even when that opinion and that judgment were re-echoed by the justice of their own hearts. He received them, and the life within them rose up, and the light shone—the conscious light of life—despite even of shame and self-reproach. If God be for us who can be against us? In his name they rose from the hell of their own heart's condemnation, and went forth to do the truth in strength and hope. They heard and believed and obeyed his words. And of all words that ever were spoken, were ever words gentler, tenderer, humbler, lovelier—if true, or more arrogant, man-degrading, God-defying—if false, than these concerning which, *as his*, I now desire to speak to you: '*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*'

"Surely these words, could they but be heartily believed, are such as every human heart might gladly hear! What man is there who has not had, has not now, or will not have to class himself amongst the weary and heavy-laden? Ye

who call yourselves Christians profess to believe such rest is to be had, yet how many of you go bowed to the very earth, and take no single step towards him who says *Come*, lift not an eye to see whether a face of mercy may not be looking down upon you! Is it that, after all, you do not believe there ever was such a man as they call Jesus? That can hardly be. There are few so ignorant or so wilfully illogical as to be able to *disbelieve* in the existence of the man, or that he spoke words to this effect. Is it then that you are doubtful concerning the whole import of his appearance? In that case, were it but as a doubtful medicine, would it not be well to make some trial of the offer made? If the man said the words, he must have at least believed that he could fulfil them. Who that knows anything of him at all can for a moment hold that this man spoke what he did not believe? The best of the Jews, who yet do not believe in him, say of him that he was a good though mistaken man. Will a man lie for the privilege of being despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? What but the confidence of truth could have sustained him when he knew that even those who loved him would have left him had they believed what he told them of his coming fate? But then: believing what he said, might he not have been mistaken? A man can hardly be mistaken as to whether he is at peace or not—whether he has rest in his soul or not. Neither, I think, can a man well be mistaken as to whence comes the peace he possesses—as to the well whence he draws his comfort. The miser knows his comfort is his gold. Was Jesus likely to be mistaken when he supposed himself to know that his comfort came from his God? Anyhow he believed that his peace came from his obedience—from his oneness with the will of his Father. Friends, if I had such peace as was plainly his, should I not know well whence it came? But I think I hear some one say, 'Doubtless the good man derived comfort from the thought of his Father, but might he not be mistaken in supposing there was any Father? Hear me, my friends: I dare not say I know there is a Father. I dare not even say

I think; I can only say with my whole heart I hope we have indeed a Father in heaven; but this man says *he knows*. Am *I* to say he does not know? Can I, who know so much I would gladly have otherwise in myself, imagine *him* less honest than I am? If he tells me he knows, I am dumb and listen. One *I know: there is*, outweighs a whole creation of voices crying each *I know not, therefore there is not*. And observe it is his own, his own best he wants to give them; no bribe to obedience to his will, but the assurance of bliss if they will do as he does. He wants them to have peace—*his* peace—peace from the same source whence he has it. For what does he mean by *Take my yoke upon you and learn of me?* He does not mean, *Wear the yoke I lay upon you, and obey my words*. I do not say he might not have said so, or that he does not say what comes to the same thing at other times, but that is not what he says here—that is not the truth he would convey in these words. He means, *Take upon you the yoke I wear; learn to do as I do, who submit everything and refer everything to the will of my Father, yea, have my will only in the carrying out of his: be meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls*. With all the grief of humanity in his heart, in the face of the death that awaited him, he yet says, *For my yoke, the yoke I wear, is easy, the burden I bear is light*. What made that yoke easy—that burden light? That it was the will of the Father. If a man answer, 'Any good man who believed in a God might say as much, and I do not see how it can help me,' my reply is, that this man says *Come unto me, and I will give you rest*—asserting the power to give perfect help to him that comes. Does all this look far away, my friends, and very unlike the things about us? The things about you do not give you peace; from something different you may hope to gain it. And do not our souls themselves fall out with their surroundings, and cry for a nobler, better, more beautiful life?

"But some one will perhaps say, 'It is well; but were I meek and lowly in heart as he of whom you speak, it could not touch *my* trouble: that springs not from myself, but from

one whom I love.' I answer, if the peace be the peace of the Son of Man, it must reach to every cause of unrest. And if thou hadst it, would it not then be next door to thy friend? How shall he whom thou lovest receive it the most readily but through thee who lovest him? What if thy faith should be the next step to his? Anyhow, if this peace be not an all-reaching as well as heart-filling peace; if it be not a righteous and a lovely peace, and that in despite of all surrounding and opposing troubles, then it is not the peace of God, for that passeth all understanding: so at least say they who profess to know, and I desire to take them at their word. If thy trouble be a trouble thy God cannot set right, then either thy God is not the true God or there is no true God, and the man who professed to reveal him led the one perfect life in virtue of his faith in a falsehood. Alas! for poor men and women and their aching hearts!—If it offend any of you that I speak of Jesus as *the man* who professed to reveal God, I answer that the man I see, and he draws me as with the strength of the adorable Truth; but if in him I should certainly find the God for the lack of whose peace I and my brethren and sisters pine, then were heaven itself too narrow to hold my exultation, for in God himself alone could my joy find room.

"Come, then, sore heart, and see whether his heart cannot heal thine. He knows what sighs and tears are, and if he knew no sin in himself, the more pitiful must it have been to him to behold the sighs and tears that guilt wrung from the tortured hearts of his brethren and sisters. Brothers, sisters, we *must* get rid of this misery of ours. It is slaying us. It is turning the fair earth into a hell, and our hearts into its fuel. There stands the man who says he knows: take him at his word. Go to him who says in the might of his eternal tenderness and his human pity, *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*"

CHAPTER XLVII.

A SERMON TO HIMSELF.

LONG ere he thus came to a close, Wingfold was blind to all and every individuality before him —felt only the general suffering of the human soul, and the new-born hope for it that lay in the story of the ideal man, the human God. He did not see that Helen's head was down on the book-board. She was sobbing convulsively. In some way the word had touched her, and had unsealed the fountain of tears, if not of faith. Neither did he see the curl on the lip of Bascombe, or the glance of annoyance which, every now and then, he cast upon the bent head beside him. "What on earth are you crying about? It is all in the way of his business, you know," said Bascombe's eyes, but Helen did not hear them. One or two more in the congregation were weeping, and here and there shone a face in which the light seemed to prevent the tears. Polwarth shone and Rachel wept. For the rest, the congregation listened only with varying degrees of attention and indifference. The larger portion looked as if neither Wingfold nor any other body ever meant anything—at least in the pulpit.

The moment Wingfold reached the vestry he hurried off the garments of his profession, sped from the Abbey, and all but ran across the churchyard to his lodging. There he shut himself up in his chamber, fearful lest he should have

said more than he had yet a right to say, and lest ebbing emotion should uncover the fact that he had been but "fired by the running of his own wheels," and not inspired by the guide of "the fiery-wheeled throne, the cherub Contemplation." There, from the congregation, from the church, from the sermon, from the past altogether, he turned aside his face and would forget them quite. What had he to do with the thing that was done—done with, and gone, either into the treasury or the lumber-room of creation? Towards the hills of help he turned his face—to the summits over whose tops he looked for the day-spring from on high to break forth. If only Christ would come to him! Do what he might, however, his thoughts *would* wander back to the great Gothic gulf into which he had been pouring out his soul, and the greater human gulfs that opened into the ancient pile, whose mouths were the faces that hid the floor beneath them—until at length he was altogether vexed with himself for being interested in what he had done instead of absorbed in what he had yet to do. He left, therefore, his chamber, and placed himself at a side-table in his sitting-room, while his landlady prepared the other for his dinner. She, too, had been at church that morning, whence it came that she moved about and set the things on the table with unusual softness, causing him no interruption while he wrote down a line here and there of what afterwards grew into the following verses—born in the effort to forget the things that were behind, and reach forth after the things that lay before him:

Yes, master, when thou comest thou shalt find
A little faith on earth, if I am here!
Thou know'st how oft I turn to thee my mind,
How sad I wait until thy face appear!

Hast thou not ploughed my thorny ground full sore,
And from it gathered many stones and sherds?
Plough, plough and harrow till it needs no more—
Then sow thy mustard-seed, and send thy birds.

I love thee, Lord; and if I yield to fears,
Nor trust with triumph that pale doubt defies,
Remember, Lord, 'tis nigh two thousand years,
And I have never seen thee with mine eyes.

And when I lift them from the wondrous tale,
  See, all about me hath so strange a show?
Is that thy river running down the vale?
  Is that thy wind that through the pines doth blow?

Could'st thou right verily appear again,
  The same who walked the paths of Palestine,
And here in England teach thy trusting men,
  In church and field and house, with word and sign?

Here are but lilies, sparrows, and the rest?
  My hands on some dear proof would light and stay!
But my heart sees John leaning on thy breast,
  And sends them forth to do what thou dost say.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CRITICISM.

"EXTRAORDINARY young man!" exclaimed Mrs. Ramshorn as they left the church, with a sigh that expressed despair. "Is he an infidel or a fanatic? a Jesuit or a Socinian?"

"If he would pay a little more attention to his composition," said Bascombe indifferently, "he might in time make of himself a good speaker. I am not at all sure there are not the elements of an orator in him, if he would only reflect a little on the fine relations between speech and passion, and learn of the best models how to play upon the feelings of a congregation. I declare I don't know but he might make a great man of himself. As long as he don't finish his sentences, however, jumbles his figures, and begins and ends abruptly without either exordium or peroration, he needn't look to make anything of a preacher—and that seems his object."

"If that be his object, he had better join the Methodists at once. He would be a treasure to them," said Mrs. Ramshorn.

"That is not his object, George. How can you say so?" remarked Helen quietly, but with some latent indignation.

George smiled a rather unpleasant smile, and held his peace.

Little more was said on the way home. Helen went to

take off her bonnet, but did not reappear until she was called to their early Sunday dinner.

Now George had counted upon a turn in the garden with her before dinner, and was annoyed—more, it is true, because of the emotion which he rightly judged the cause of her not joining him, than the necessity laid on him of eating his dinner without having first unburdened his mind; but the latter fact also had its share in vexing him.

When she came into the drawing-room it was plain she had been weeping; but, although they were alone, and would probably have to wait yet a few minutes before their aunt joined them, he resolved in his good nature to be considerate, and say nothing till after dinner, lest he should spoil her appetite. When they rose from the table she would have again escaped, but when George left his wine and followed her, she consented, at his urgent, almost expostulatory, request, to walk once round the garden with him.

As soon as they were out of sight of the windows, he began—in the tone of one whose love it is that prompts rebuke—

"How *could* you, my dear Helen, have so little care of your health, already so much shaken with nursing your brother, as to yield your mind to the maundering of that silly ecclesiastic, and allow his false eloquence to untune your nerves! Remember your health is the first thing—positively the *first* and foremost thing to be considered, both for your own sake and that of your friends. Without health, what is anything worth?"

Helen made no answer, but she thought with herself there were two or three things for the sake of which she would willingly part with a considerable portion of her health. Her cousin imagined her conscience-stricken, and resumed with yet greater confidence:

"If you *must* go to church, you ought to prepare yourself beforehand by firmly impressing on your mind the fact that the whole thing is but part of a system—part of a false system; that the preacher has been brought up to the trade

of religion, that it is his business, and that he must lay himself out to persuade people—himself first of all if he can, but anyhow his congregation—of the truth of everything contained in that farrago of priestly absurdities called the Bible, forsooth! as if there were no other book worthy to be mentioned beside it. Think, for a moment, how soon, were it not for their churches and prayers and music, and their tomfoolery of preaching, the whole precious edifice would topple about their ears, and the livelihood, the means of contentment and influence, would be gone from so many restless, paltering spirits! So what is left them but to play upon the hopes and fears and diseased consciences of men as best they can! The idiot! To tell a man when he is hipped to *come unto me!* Bah! Does the fool really expect any grown man or woman to believe in his or her brain that the man who spoke those words, if ever there was a man who spoke them, can at this moment, *anni domini*"—George liked to be correct—"1870, hear whatever silly words the Rev. Mr. Wingfold or any other human biped may think proper to address to him with his face buried in his blankets by his bedside or in his surplice over the pulpit Bible?—not to mention that they would have you believe, or be damned to all eternity, that every thought vibrated in the convolutions of your brain is known to him as well as to yourself! The thing is really too absurd! Ha! ha! ha! The man died—the death of a malefactor, they say—and his body was stolen from his grave by his followers, that they might impose thousands of years of absurdity upon the generations to come after them. And now, when a fellow feels miserable, he is to cry to that dead man who said of himself that he was meek and lowly in heart, and straightway the poor beggar shall find rest to his soul! All I can say is that if he find rest so, it will be the rest of an idiot! Believe me, Helen, a good Havana and a bottle of claret would be considerably more to the purpose; for ladies, perhaps rather a cup of tea and a little Beethoven!" Here he laughed, for the rush of his eloquence had swept away his bad humour. "But really," he went on, "the whole thing is *too* absurd to

talk about. To go whining after an old Jew fable in these days of progress! Why, what do you think is the last discovery about light?"

"You will allow this much in excuse for their being so misled," returned Helen, with some bitterness, "that the old fable pretends at least to provide help for sore hearts; and except it be vivisection, I—"

"Do be serious, Helen," interrupted George. "I don't object to joking, you know, but you are not joking in a right spirit. This matter has to do with the well-being of the race; and we *must* think of others, however your Jew-gospel, in the genuine spirit of the Hebrew of all time, would set everybody to the saving of his own wind-bubble of a soul. Believe me, to live for others is the true way to lose sight of our own fancied sorrows."

Helen gave a deep sigh. Fancied sorrows!—Yes, gladly indeed would she live for *one* other at least! Nay, more—she would die for him. But, alas! what would that do for one whose very being was consumed with grief ineffable! She must speak, else he would read her heart.

"There are real sorrows," she said. "They are not all fancied."

"There are very few sorrows," returned George, "in which fancy does not bear a stronger proportion than even a woman of sense, while the fancy is upon her, will be prepared to admit. I can remember bursts of grief, when I was a boy, in which it seemed impossible anything should ever console me; but in one minute all would be gone, and my heart, or my spleen, or my diaphragm as merry as ever. Believe that all is well, and you will find all will be well—very tolerably well, that is, considering."

"Considering that the well-being has to be divided and apportioned and accommodated to the various parts of such a huge whole, and that there is no God to look after the business!" said Helen, who, according to the state of the tide in the sea of her trouble, resented or accepted her cousin's teaching.

Few women are willing to believe in death. Most of them love life and are faithful to hope; and I much doubt whether, if Helen had but had a taste of trouble to rouse the woman within her before her cousin conceived the wish of making her a proselyte, she would have turned even a tolerably patient ear to his instructions. Yet it is strange to see how even noble women, with the divine gift of imagination, may be argued into unbelief in their best instincts by some small man, as commonplace as clever, who beside them is as limestone to marble. The knowing craft comes creeping up into the shadow of the rich galleon, and lo! with all her bountiful sails gleaming in the sun, the ship of God glides off in the wake of the felucca to the sweltering hollows betwixt the winds!

"You perplex me, my dear cousin," said Bascombe. "It is plain your nursing has been too much for you. You see everything with a jaundiced eye."

"Thank you, cousin George," said Helen. "You are even more courteous than usual."

She turned from him and went into the house. Bascombe walked to the bottom of the garden and lighted his cigar, confessing to himself that for once he could not understand Helen.—Was it, then, only that he was ignorant of the awful fact that lay burrowing in her heart, or was he not ignorant also of the nature of that heart in which such a fact must so burrow? Was there anything in his system to wipe off that burning, torturing red? "Such things must be: men who wrong society must suffer for the sake of that society." But the red lay burning on the conscience of Helen too, and she had not murdered! And for him who had, he gave society never a thought, but shrieked aloud in his dreams, and moaned and wept, when he waked, over the memory of the woman who had wronged him, and whom he had, if Bascombe was right, swept out of being like an aphis from a rose-leaf.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A VANISHING GLIMMER.

HELEN ran upstairs, dropped on her knees by her brother's bedside, and fell into a fit of sobbing which no tears came to relieve.

"Helen! Helen! if you give way I shall go mad!" said a voice of misery from the pillow.

She jumped up wiping her dry eyes.

"What a wicked, selfish, bad sister, bad nurse, bad everything I am, Poldie!" she said, her tones ascending the steps of vocal indignation as she spoke. "But shall I tell you"—here she looked all about the chamber and into the dressing-room ere she proceeded—"shall I tell you, Poldie, what it is that makes me so—I don't know what?—It is all the fault of the sermon I heard this morning. It is the first sermon I ever really listened to in my life—certainly the first I ever thought about again after I was out of the church. Somehow or other of late Mr. Wingfold has been preaching so strangely! but this is the first time I have cared to listen. Do you know he preaches as if he actually believed the things he was saying, and not only that, but as if he expected to persuade you of them too! I *used* to think all clergymen believed them, but I doubt it now more than ever, for Mr. Wingfold speaks so differently and looks so different. I never saw any clergyman look like that; and I never saw such a change on a

man as there is on him. There must be something to account for it. Could it be that he has himself really gone to —as he says—and found rest—or something he hadn't got before? But you wont't know what I mean except I tell you first what he was preaching about. His text was : *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden ;*—a common enough text, you know, Poldie ! but somehow it seemed fresh to him, and he made it look fresh to me, for I felt as if it hadn't been intended for preaching about at all, but for going straight into people's hearts its own self without any sermon. I think the way he did it was this ; he first made us feel the sort of person that said the words, and then made us feel that he *did* say them, and so made us want to see what they could really mean. But of course what made them so different to me was "—here Helen did burst into tears, but she fought with her sobs and went on—"was—was—that my heart is breaking for you, Poldie—for I shall never see you smile again, my darling !"

She buried her face on his pillow and Leopold uttered "a great and exceeding bitter cry." Her hand was on his mouth instantly, and her sobs ceased while the tears kept flowing down her white face.

"Just think, Poldie," she said, in a voice which she seemed to have borrowed in her need from some one else "—just think a moment ! What if there should be some help in the great wide universe somewhere, for—as wide as it is —a heart that feels for us both, as my heart feels for you, Poldie ! Oh ! oh ! wouldn't it be grand ! Wouldn't it be lovely to be at peace again, Poldie ? If there should be somebody somewhere who could take this gnawing serpent from my heart !"—she pulled wildly at her dress. "'*Come unto me*,' he said, '*all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*' That's what he said : —oh ! if it could be true !"

"Surely it is—for you, best of sisters !" cried Leopold ; "but what has it to do with me ? Nothing. She is *dead*— I killed her. Even if God were to raise her to life again, *he* could not make it that I didn't drive the knife into her heart !

Give *me* rest !—why there's the hand that did it ! O my God ! my God ! " cried the poor youth, and stared at his thin, wasted hand, through which the light shone red, as at a conscious evil thing that had done the deed, and was still stained with its signs.

" God *can't* be very angry with you, Poldie," sobbed Helen, feeling about blindly in the dark forest of her thoughts for some herb of comfort, and offering any leaf upon which her hand fell first.

" Then he ain't fit to be God ! " cried Leopold fiercely. " I wouldn't have a word to say to a God that didn't cut a man in pieces for such a deed ! O Helen, she was so lovely !—and what is she now ! "

" Surely if there were a God, he would do something to set it right somehow ! I know if I was God, Poldie, I should find some way of setting you up again, my darling. You ain't half as bad as you make yourself out."

" You had better tell that to the jury, Helen, and see how they will take it," said Leopold contemptuously.

" The jury ! " Helen almost screamed. " What do you mean, Poldie ? "

" Well ! " returned Leopold, in a tone of justification, but made no further answer to her question. " All God can do to set it right," he resumed after a pause, " is to damn me for ever and ever as one of the blackest creatures in creation."

" *That* I don't believe, anyhow ! " returned Helen with equal vehemence and indefiniteness.

And for the first time George Bascombe's teachings were a comfort to her. It was all nonsense about a God. As to her brother's misery, it had no source but that to which Shakspeare attributed the misery of Macbeth—and who should know better than Shakspeare ?—the fear, namely, of people doing the like to himself !—But straightway thereupon—horrible thought !—she found herself—yes ! it was *in* her—call it thought or call it feeling, it was hers !—she found herself despising her poor crushed brother ! disgusted with him ! turning from him, not even in scorn of his weakness,

but in anger at what he had brought upon her !—It was but a flash of the lightning of hell : one glance of his great, troubled, appealing, yet hopeless eyes, vague with the fogs that steamed up from the Phlegethon within him, was enough to turn her anger at him into hate of herself who had stabbed his angel in her heart. Then in herself she knew that all murderers are not of Macbeth's order, and that all remorse is not for oneself.

But where was the God to be found who could and *might* help in the wretched case? How were they to approach him? Or what could he do for them? Were such a being to assure Leopold that no hurt should come to him—even that he thought little of the wrong that he had done, would that make his crushed heart begin to swell again with fresh life? would that bring back Emmeline from the dark grave and the worms to the sunny earth and the speech of men? And whither, yet farther, he might have sent her, she dared not think. And Leopold was not merely at strife with himself, but condemned to dwell with a self that was loathsome to him. She no longer saw any glimmer of hope but such as lay in George's doctrine of death. If there was no helper who could clean hearts and revive the light of life, then welcome gaunt death ! let the grim-mouthed skeleton be crowned at every feast !

CHAPTER L.

LET US PRAY.

THAT was the sole chink in the prison where these two sat immured alone from their kind—except, indeed, the curate might know of another.

One thing Helen had ground for being certain of—that the curate would tell them no more than he knew. Even George Bascombe, who did not believe one thing he said, counted him an honest man! Might she venture to consult him, putting the case as of a person who had done very wrong—say stolen money or committed forgery or something? Might she not thus gather a little honey of comfort and bring it home to Leopold?

Thinking thus and thus she sat silent; and all the time the suffering eyes were fixed upon her face, looking for no comfort, but finding there all they ever had of rest.

"Are you thinking about the sermon, Helen?" he asked. "What was it you were telling me about it just now? Who preached it?"

"Mr. Wingfold," she answered listlessly.

"Who is Mr. Wingfold?"

"Our curate at the Abbey?"

"What sort of man is he?"

"Oh, a man somewhere about thirty—a straightforward, ordinary kind of man."

"Ah!" said Leopold—then added after a moment—"I was hoping he might be an old man, with a gray head, like the brahmin who used to teach me Sanscrit.—I wish I had treated him better, poor old fellow; and learned a little more."

"What does it matter about Sanscrit! Why should you make troubles of trifles?" said Helen, whose trials had at last begun to undermine her temper.

"It was not of the Sanscrit, but the moonshee I was thinking," answered Leopold, mildly.

"You darling!" cried Helen, already repentant. But with the revulsion she felt that this state of things could not long continue—she must either lose her senses, or turn into something hateful to herself; the strain was more than she could bear. She *must* speak to somebody, and she would try whether she could not approach the subject with Mr. Wingfold.

But how was she to see him? It would be awkward to call upon him at his lodgings, and she must see him absolutely alone to dare a whisper of what was on her mind.

As she thus reflected, the thought of what people would say, were it remarked that she contrived to meet the curate, brought a shadow of scorn upon her face. Leopold saw the expression, and, sensitive as an ailing woman, said: "Helen, what *have* I done to make you look like that?"

"How did I look, my Poldie?" she asked, turning on him eyes like brimming wells of love and tenderness.

"Let me see," answered Leopold; and after a moment's thought replied, "as Milton's Satan might have looked if Mammon had counselled him to make off with the crown-jewels instead of declaring war."

"Ah, Poldie!" cried Helen, delighted at the stray glance of sunshine, and kissing him as she spoke, "you must really be getting better!—I'll tell you what!" she exclaimed joyfully, as a new thought struck her: "As soon as you are able, we will set out for New York—to pay uncle Tom a visit of course! but we shall never be seen or heard of again. At New York we will change our names, cross to San

Francisco, and from there sail for the Sandwich Islands. Perhaps we may be able to find a little one to buy, just big enough for us two ; and you shall marry a nice native,——"

Her forced gaiety gave way. She burst out weeping afresh, and throwing her arms round him, sobbed—

"Poldie, Poldie ! you can pray : cry to God to help us somehow or other ; and if there be no God to hear us, then let us die together. There are easy ways of it, Poldie."

"Thank you ! thank you, sister dear !" he answered, pressing her to his bosom : "that is the first word of real comfort you have spoken to me. I shall not be afraid if you go with me."

It was indeed a comfort to both of them to remember that there was this alternative equally to the gallows and a long life of gnawing fear and remorse. But it was only to be a last refuge of course. Helen withdrew to the dressing-room, laid herself on her bed, and began to compass how to meet and circumvent the curate, so as by an innocent cunning to wile from him on false pretences what spiritual balm she might so gain for the torn heart and conscience of her brother. There was no doubt it would be genuine, and the best to be had, seeing George Bascombe, who was honesty itself, judged the curate an honest man. But how was it to be done ? She could only see one way. With some inconsistency, she resolved to cast herself upon his generosity, and yet would not trust him entirely.

She did not go down stairs again, but had her tea with her brother. In the evening her aunt went out to visit some of her pensioners, for it was one of Mrs. Ramshorn's clerical duties to be kind to the poor—a good deal at their expense, I am afraid—and presently George came to the door of the sick-room and begged her to go down and sing to him. Of course, in the house of a dean's relict, no music except sacred must be heard on a Sunday ; but to have Helen sing it, George would condescend even to a hymn tune ; and there was Handel, for whom he professed a great admiration ! What mattered his subjects ? He could but compose the sort of thing the court wanted of him, and in order to

that, had to fuddle his brains first, poor fellow! So said George, at least.

That Leopold might not hear them talking outside his door, a thing which no invalid likes, Helen went down stairs with her cousin; but although she had often sung from Handel for his pleasure, content to reproduce the bare sounds and caring nothing about the feelings both they and the words represented, she positively refused this evening to gratify him. She must go back to Leopold. She would sing from *The Creation* if he liked, but nothing out of *The Messiah* would she or could she sing.

Perhaps she could herself hardly have told why, but George perceived the lingering influence of the morning's sermon, and more vexed than he had ever yet been with her, for he could not endure her to cherish the least prejudice in favour of what he despised, he said he would overtake his aunt, and left the house. The moment he was gone, she went to the piano, and began to sing, *Comfort ye.* When she came to *Come unto me*, she broke down. But with sudden resolution she rose, and having opened every door between it and her brother, raised the top of the piano, and then sang, *Come unto me* as she had never sung in her life. Nor did she stop there. At the distance of six of the wide standing houses, her aunt and cousin heard her singing *Thou didst not leave*, with the tone and expression of a prophetess —of a Maenad, George said. She was still singing when he opened the door, but when they reached the drawing-room she was gone. She was kneeling beside her brother.

CHAPTER LI.

TWO LETTERS.

THE next morning as Wingfold ate his breakfast by an open window looking across the churchyard, he received a letter by the local post. It was as follows :—

"Dear Mr. Wingfold, I am about to take an unheard-of liberty, but my reasons are such as make me bold. The day may come when I shall be able to tell you them all. Meantime I hope you can help me. I want very much to ask your counsel upon a certain matter, and I cannot beg you to call, for my aunt knows nothing of it. Could you contrive a suitable way of meeting? You may imagine my necessity is grievous when I thus expose myself to the possible bitterness of my own after judgment. But I must have confidence in the man who spoke as you did yesterday morning. I am, dear Mr. Wingfold, sincerely yours, Helen Lingard.

"*P.S.*—I shall be walking along Pine Street from our end, at eleven o'clock to-morrow."

The curate was not taken with a great surprise. But something like fear overshadowed him at finding his sermons come back upon him thus. Was he, an unbelieving labourer, to go reaping with his blunt and broken sickle where the corn was ripest! But he had no time to think about that now. It was nearly ten o'clock, and she would be looking for her

answer at eleven. He had not to think long, however, before he saw what seemed a suitable plan to suggest ; whereupon he wrote as follows :

" Dear Miss Lingard, I need not say that I am entirely at your service. But I am doubtful if the only way that occurs to me will commend itself to you. I *know* what I am about to propose is safe, but you may not have sufficient confidence in my judgment to accept it as such.

" Doubtless you have seen the two deformed persons, an uncle and niece, named Polwarth, who keep the gate of Osterfield Park. I know them well, and, strange as it may seem, I must tell you, in order that you may partake of my confidence, that whatever change you may have observed in my public work, is owing to the influence of those two, who have more faith in God than I have ever met with before. It may not be amiss to mention also that, although poor and distorted, they are of gentle blood as well as noble nature. With this preamble, I venture to propose that you should meet me at their cottage. To them it would not appear at all strange that one of my congregation should wish to see me alone, and I know you may trust their discretion. But while I write thus with all confidence in you and in them, I must tell you that I have none in myself. I feel both ashamed and perplexed that you should imagine any help in me. Of all I know, I am the poorest creature to give counsel. All I can say for myself is, that I think I see a glimmer of light, and light is light through whatever cranny, and into whatever poverty-stricken chamber it may fall. Whatever I see, I will say. If I can see nothing to help you, I will be silent. And yet I may be able to direct you where to find what I cannot give you. If you accept my plan, and will appoint day and hour, I shall acquaint the Polwarths with the service we desire of them. Should you object to it, I shall try to think of another. I am, dear Miss Lingard, yours very truly, Thomas Wingfold."

He placed the letter between the pages of a pamphlet, took his hat and stick, and was walking down Pine Street as the Abbey clock struck eleven. Midway he met Helen,

shook hands with her, and after an indifferent word or two, gave her the pamphlet, and bade her good morning.

Helen hurried home. It had required all her self-command to look him in the face, and her heart beat almost painfully as she opened the letter.

She could not but be pleased—even more than pleased with it. If the secret had been her own, she thought she could have trusted him entirely, but she must not expose poor Leopold.

By the next post, the curate received a grateful answer, appointing the time, and expressing perfect readiness to trust those whom he had tried.

She was received at the cottage-door by Rachel, who asked her to walk into the garden, where Mr. Wingfold was expecting her. The curate led her to a seat overgrown with honeysuckle.

CHAPTER LII.

ADVICE IN THE DARK.

IT was some moments before either of them spoke, and it did not help Wingfold that she sat clouded by a dark-coloured veil. At length he said,

"You must not fear to trust me because I doubt my ability to help you. I can at least assure you of my sympathy. The trouble I have myself had enables me to promise you that."

"Can you tell me," she said, from behind more veils than that of lace, "how to get rid of a haunting idea?"

"That depends on the nature of the idea, I should imagine," answered the curate. "Such things sometimes arise merely from the state of the health, and there the doctor is the best help."

Helen shook her head, and smiled behind her veil a grievous smile. The curate paused, but receiving no assistance, ventured on again.

"If it be a thought of something past and gone, for which nothing can be done, I think activity in one's daily work must be the best aid to endurance."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" sighed Helen, "—when one has no heart to endure, and hates the very sunlight!—You wouldn't talk about work to a man dying of hunger, would you?"

"I'm not sure about that."

"He wouldn't heed you."

"Perhaps not."

"What would you do then?"

"Give him some food, and try him again, I think."

"Then give me some food—some hope, I mean, and try me again. Without that, I don't care about duty or life or anything."

"Tell me then what is the matter: I *may* be able to hint at some hope," said Wingfold very gently. "Do you call yourself a Christian?"

The question would to most people have sounded strange, abrupt, inquisitorial; but to Helen it sounded not one of them all.

"No," she answered.

"Ah!" said the curate a little sadly and went on. "Because then I could have said, you know where to go for comfort. Might it not be well however to try if there is any to be had from him that said *Come unto me and I will give you rest?*"

"I can do nothing with that. I have tried and tried to pray, but it is of no use. There is such a weight on my heart that no power of mine can lift it up. I suppose it is because I cannot believe there is any one hearing a word I say. Yesterday, when I got alone in the park, I prayed aloud; I thought that perhaps even if he might not be able to read what was in my heart, he might be able to hear my voice. I was even foolish enough to wish that I knew Greek, because perhaps he would understand me better if I were to pray in Greek. My brain seems turning. It is no use! There is no help anywhere!"

She tried hard but could not prevent a sob. And then came a burst of tears.

"Will you not tell me something about it?" said the curate, yet more gently. Oh, how gladly would he relieve her heart if he might! "Perhaps Jesus has begun to give you help, though you do not know it yet," he said. "His help may be on the way to you, or even with you, only you

do not recognise it for what it is. I have known that kind of thing. Tell me some fact or some feeling I can lay hold of. Possibly there is something you ought to do and are not doing, and that is why you cannot rest. I think Jesus would give no rest except in the way of learning of him."

Helen's sobs ceased, but what appeared to the curate a long silence followed. At length she said, with faltering voice :

"Suppose it were a great wrong that had been done, and that was the unendurable thought? *Suppose*, I say, that was what made me miserable?"

"Then you must of course make all possible reparation," answered Wingfold at once.

"But if none were possible—what then?"

Here the answer was not so plain and the curate had to think.

"At least," he said at length, "you could confess the wrong, and ask forgiveness."

"But if that were also impossible," said Helen, shuddering inwardly to find how near she drew to the edge of the awful fact.

Again the curate took time to reply.

"I am endeavouring to answer your questions as well as I can," he said ; but it is hard to deal with generalities. You see how useless, for that very reason, my answers have as yet been ! Still I have something more to say, and hesitate only because it may imply more confidence than I dare profess, and of all things I dread untruth. But I am honest in this much at least, that I desire with true heart to find a God who will acknowledge me as his creature and make me his child, and if there be any God I am nearly certain he will do so ; for surely there cannot be any other kind of God than the Father of Jesus Christ ! In the strength of this much of conscious truth I venture to say—that no crime can be committed against a creature without being committed also against the creator of that creature ; therefore surely the first step for any one who has committed such a

crime must be to humble himself before God, confess the sin, and ask forgiveness and cleansing. If there is anything in religion at all it must rest upon an actual individual communication between God and the creature he has made ; and if God heard the man's prayer and forgave him, then the man would certainly know it in his heart and be consoled—perhaps by the gift of humility."

"Then you think confession to God is all that is required?"

"If there be no one else wronged to whom confession can be made. If the case were mine—and sometimes I much fear that in taking holy orders I have grievously sinned—I should then do just as I have done with regard to that—cry to the living power which I think originated me, to set the matter right for me."

"But if it could not be set right?"

"Then to forgive and console me."

"Alas ! alas ! that he will not hear of. He would rather be punished than consoled. I fear for his brain. But indeed that might be well."

She had gone much farther than she had intended ; but the more doubtful help became, the more was she driven by the agony of a perishing hope to search the heart of Wingfold.

Again the curate pondered.

"Are you sure," he said at length, "that the person of whom you speak is not neglecting something he ought to do—something he knows, perhaps?"

He had come back to the same with which he had started.

Through her veil he saw her turn deadly white. Ever since Leopold said the word *jury*, a ghastly fear had haunted Helen. She pressed her hand on her heart and made no answer.

"I speak from experience," the curate went on, "from what else could I speak? I know that so long as we hang back from doing what conscience urges, there is no peace for us. I will not say our prayers are not heard, for Mr. Polwarth has taught me that the most precious answer prayer can have lies in the growing strength of the impulse

towards the dreaded duty, and in the ever sharper stings of the conscience. I think I asked already whether there were no relatives to whom reparation could be made?"

"Yes, yes;" gasped Helen, "and I told you reparation was impossible."

Her voice sunk almost to a groan.

"But at least confession—" said Wingfold—and started from his seat.

CHAPTER LIII.

INTERCESSION.

A STIFLED cry had interrupted him. Helen was pressing her handkerchief to her mouth. She rose and ran from him. Wingfold stood alarmed and irresolute. She had not gone many steps, however, when her pace slackened, her knees gave way, and she dropped senseless on the grass. Wingfold ran to the house for water. Rachel hastened to her assistance, and Polwarth followed. It was some time before they succeeded in reviving her.

When at length the colour began to return a little to her cheek, Polwarth dropped on his knees at her feet. Wingfold in his ministrations was already kneeling on one side of her, and Rachel now kneeled on the other. Then Polwarth said, in his low and husky, yet not altogether unmelodious voice,

"Life eternal, this lady of thine hath a sore heart and we cannot help her. Thou art Help, O mighty love. They who know thee best rejoice in thee most. As thy sun that shines over our heads, as thy air that flows into our bodies, thou art above, around, and in us; thou art in her heart; oh, speak to her there; let her know thy will, and give her strength to do it, O Father of Jesus Christ! Amen."

When Helen opened her eyes, she saw only the dark leaves of an arbutus over her, and knew nothing beyond a sense of utter misery and weakness, with an impulse to rise

and run. With an effort she moved her head a little, and then she saw the three kneeling forms, the clergyman with bowed head, and the two dwarfs with shining upturned faces; she thought she was dead and they were kneeling about her corpse. Her head dropped with a weary sigh of relief, she lay passive, and heard the dwarf's prayer. Then she knew that she was not dead, and the disappointment was bitter. But she thought of Leopold, and was consoled. After a few minutes of quiet, they helped her into the house, and laid her on a sofa in the parlour.

"Don't be frightened, dear lady," said the little woman; "nobody shall come near you. We will watch you as if you were the queen. I am going to get some tea for you."

But the moment she left the room, Helen got up. She could not endure a moment longer in the place. There was a demon at her brother's ear, whispering to him to confess, to rid himself of his torture by the aid of the law; she must rush home and drive him away. She took her hat in her hand, opened the door softly, and ere Rachel could say a word, had flitted through the kitchen, and was amongst the trees on the opposite side of the road. Rachel ran to the garden to her uncle and Wingfold. They looked at each other for a moment in silence.

"I will follow her," said Wingfold. "She may faint again. If she does I shall whistle."

He followed, and kept her in sight until she was safe in her aunt's garden.

"What *is* to be done?" he said, returning in great trouble. "I do not think I made any blunder, but there she is gone in tenfold misery! I wish I could tell you what passed, but that of course I cannot."

"Of course not," returned Polwarth. "But the fact of her leaving you so is no sign that you said the wrong thing,—rather the contrary. When people seek advice, it is too often in the hope of finding the adviser side with their second familiar self, instead of their awful first self, of which they know so little. Do not be anxious. You have done your best. Wait for what will come next."

CHAPTER LIV.

HELEN ALONE.

HELEN tottered to a little summer-house in the garden, which had been her best retreat since she had given her room to her brother, and there seated herself to regain breath and composure ere she went to him. She had sought the door of Paradise, and the door of hell had been opened to her! If the frightful idea which, she did not doubt, had already suggested itself to Leopold, should now be encouraged, there was nothing but black madness before her! Her Poldie on the scaffold! God in heaven! Infinitely rather would she poison herself and him! Then she remembered how pleased and consoled he had been when she said something about their dying together, and that reassured her a little: no; she was certain Leopold would never yield himself to public shame! But she must take care that foolish, extravagant curate should not come near him! There was no knowing to what he might persuade him! Poor Poldie was so easily led by any show of nobility—anything that looked grand or self-sacrificing!

Helen's only knowledge of guilt came from the pale image of it lifted above her horizon by the refraction of her sympathy. She did not know, perhaps never would understand, the ghastly horror of conscious guilt, beside which there is no evil else. Agonies of injury a man may endure, and, so

far from being overwhelmed, rise above them tenfold a man, who, were he to awake to the self-knowledge of a crime, would sink into a heap of ruin. Then, indeed, if there be no God, or one that has not an infinite power of setting right that which has gone wrong with his work, then indeed welcome the faith, for faith it may then be called, of such as say there is no hereafter! Helen did not know to what gulfs of personal shame, nay, to what summits of public execration, a man may be glad to flee for refuge from the fangs of home-born guilt—if so be there is any refuge to be found in either. And some kind of refuge there does seem to be. Strange it is and true, that in publicity itself lies some relief from the gnawing of the worm—as if even a cursing humanity were a barrier of protection between the torn soul and its crime. It flees to its kind for shelter from itself. Hence, I imagine, in part, may the coolness of some criminals be accounted for. Their quietness is the relief brought by confession—even confession but to their fellows. Is it that the crime seems then lifted a little from their shoulders, and its weight shared by the race?

Helen had hoped that the man who had spoken in public so tenderly, and at the same time so powerfully, of the saving heart of the universe, that would have no divisions of pride, no scatterings of hate, but of many would make one, would in private have spoken yet sweeter words of hope and consolation, which she might have carried home in gladness to her sick-souled brother, to comfort and strengthen him—words of might to allay the burning of the poison within him, and make him feel that after all there was yet a place for him in the universe, and that he was no outcast of Gehenna. But instead of such words of gentle might, like those of the man of whom he was so fond of talking, he had only spoken drearily of duty, hinting at a horror that would plunge the whole ancient family into a hell of dishonour and contempt! It did indeed show what mere heartless windbags of effete theology those priests were! Skeletons they were, and no human beings at all!—Her father!—the thought of him was distraction! Her mother! Oh, if

Leopold had had her mother for his too, instead of the dark-skinned woman with the flashing eyes, he would never have brought this upon them! It was all his mother's fault—the fault of her race—and of the horrible drug her people had taught him to take! And was he to go and confess it, and be tried for it, and be——? Great God!—And here was the priest actually counselling what was worse than any suicide!

Suddenly, however, it occurred to her that the curate had had no knowledge of the facts of the case, and had therefore been compelled to talk at random. It was impossible he should suspect the crime of which her brother had been guilty, and therefore could not know the frightful consequences of such a confession as he had counselled. Had she not better then tell him all, and so gather from him some right and reasonable advice for the soothing of the agonies of her poor broken-winged angel? But alas! what security had she that a man capable of such priestly severity and heartlessness—her terrors made her thus inconsequent—would not himself betray the all but innocent sufferer to the vengeance of justice so-called? No; she would venture no further. Sooner would she go to George Bascombe—from whom she not only could look for no spiritual comfort, but whose theories were so cruel against culprits of all sorts! Alas, alas! she was alone! absolutely alone in the great waste, death-eyed universe!—But for a man to talk so of the tenderness of Jesus Christ and then serve her as the curate had done—it was indeed shameless! *He* would never have treated a poor wretched woman like that!—And as she said thus to herself, again the words sounded in the ear of her heart: "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.*" Whence came the voice? From her memory, or from that inner chamber of the spirit which the one spirit-bearing spirit keeps for his own in every house that he builds—alas so long in most human houses shut away from the rest of the rooms and forgotten, or recollected with uneasiness, as a lumber-closet in which lie too many things that had better not be looked into? But

what matter where the voice that said them, so long as the words were true, and she might believe them !—whatever is true *can* be believed of the true heart.

Ere she knew, Helen was on her knees, with her head on the chair, yet once more crying to the hearer of cries—possible or impossible being she know not in the least, but words reported of him had given birth to the cry—to help her in her dire need.

Instead of any word, or thought even, coming to her that might be fancied an answer, she was scared from her knees by an approaching step—that of the housekeeper come to look for her with the message from her aunt that Leopold was more restless than usual, not at all like himself, and she could do nothing with him.

CHAPTER LV.

A HAUNTED SOUL.

HELEN rose and hastened to her brother, with a heart of lead in her body.

She started when she saw him; some change had passed on him since the morning! Was that eager look in his eyes a fresh access of the fever? That glimmer on his countenance, doubtful as the first of the morning, when the traveller knows not whether the light be in the sky or only in his brain, did look more like a dawn of his old healthy radiance than any fresh fire of madness; but at the same time he appeared more wasted and pinched and death-like than she had yet seen him. Or was it only in her eyes—was she but reading in his face the agony she had herself gone through that day?

"Helen, Helen;" he cried as she entered the room, "come here, close to me."

She hastened to him, sat down on the bedside, took his hand and looked as cheerfully as she could, yet it was but the more woefully, in his face.

"Helen," he said again, and he spoke with a strange expression in his voice, for it seemed that of hope, "I have been thinking all day of what you told me on Sunday!"

"What was that, Poldie?" asked Helen with a pang of fear.

"Why, those words of course—what else! You sang them to me afterwards, you know. Helen, I should like to see Mr. Wingfold. Don't you think he might be able to do something?"

"What sort of thing, Poldie!" she faltered, growing sick at heart.—Was this what came of praying! she thought bitterly.

"Something or other—I don't know what exactly," returned Leopold.—"Oh Helen!" he broke out with a cry, stifled by the caution that had grown habitual to both of them, "is there no help of any kind anywhere? Surely Mr. Wingfold could tell me something—comfort me somehow, if I were to tell him all about it! I could trust the man that said such things as those you told me. That I could! Oh! I wish I hadn't run away, but had let them take me and hang me!"

Helen felt herself growing white. She turned away and pretended to search for something she had dropped.

"I don't think he would be of the slightest use to you," she said, still stooping.

And she felt like a devil dragging the soul of her brother to hell. But that was a foolish fancy, and must be resisted!

"Not if I told him everything?" Leopold hissed from between his teeth in the struggle to keep down a shriek.

"No, not if you told him everything," she answered, and felt like a judge condemning him to death.

"What is he there for then?" said Leopold indignantly, and turned his face to the wall and moaned.

Helen had not yet thought of asking herself whether her love to her brother was all clear love, and nowise mingled with selfishness—whether in the fresh horror that day poured into the cup that had seemed already running over, it was of her brother only she thought, or whether threatened shame to herself had not a part in her misery. But as far as she was aware, she was quite honest in saying that the curate could not comfort him—for what attempt even had he made to comfort her? What had he done but utter commonplaces and truisms about duty? And who could tell but—indeed

was she not certain that such a man, bringing the artillery of his fanaticism to bear upon her poor boy's wild, enthusiastic temperament, would speedily persuade him to make a reality of that terrible thing he had already thought of, that hideously impossible possibility which she dared not even allow to present itself before her imagination? So he lay and moaned, and she sat crushed and speechless with despairing misery.

All at once Leopold sat straight up, his eyes fixed and flaming, his face white: he looked like a corpse possessed by a spirit of fear and horror. Helen's heart swelled into her throat, the muscles of her face contracted with irresistible rigour, and she felt it grow exactly like his, while with wide eyes she stared at him, and he stared at something which lest she also should see, she dared not turn her head. Surely, she thought afterwards, she must have been at that moment in the presence of something unearthly! Her physical being was wrenched from her control, and she must simply sit and wait until the power or influence, whichever it might be, should pass away. How long it was ere it relaxed its hold she could not tell; it could not have been long, she thought. Suddenly the light sank from Leopold's eyes, his muscles relaxed, he fell back motionless, apparently senseless, on the pillow, and she thought he was dead. The same moment she was free; the horror had departed from her own atmosphere too, and she made haste to restore him. But in all she did for him, she felt like the executioner who gives restoratives to the wretch that has fainted on the wrack or the wheel. What right had *she*, she thought, to multiply on him his moments of torture? If the cruel power that had created him for such misery, whoever, whatever, wherever he might be, chose thus to torture him, was she, his only friend, out of the selfish affection he had planted in her, to lend herself his tool? Yet she hesitated not a single moment in her ministrations.

There is so much passes in us of which our consciousness takes no grasp,—or but with such a flitting touch as scarcely to hand it over to the memory—that I feel encouraged to doubt whether ever there was a man absolutely without hope.

That there have been, alas are many, who are aware of no ground of hope, nay even who feel no glimmer in them of anything they can call hope, I know ; but I think in them all is an underlying unconscious hope. I think that not one in all the world has more than a shadowy notion of what hopelessness means. Perhaps utter hopelessness is the outer darkness.

At length Leopold opened his eyes, gave a terrified glance around, held out his arms to her, and drew her down upon his face.

"I saw her!" he said, in a voice that sounded as if it came from the grave, and she heard it in her heart.

"Nonsense, dear Poldie! it was all fancy—nothing more," she returned, in a voice almost as hollow as his ; and the lightness of the words uttered in such a tone jarred dismally on her own ear.

"Fancy!" he repeated ; "I know what fancy is as well as any man or woman born : *that* was no fancy. She stood there, by the wardrobe—in the same dress! her face as white as her dress! And—listen!—I will tell *you*—I will soon satisfy you it *could* be no fancy."—Here he pushed her from him and looked straight in her eyes.—"I saw her back reflected in the mirror of the wardrobe door, and"—here the fixed look of horror threatened to return upon his face, but he went on—"listen,—there was a worm crawling on it, over her lovely white shoulder! Ugh! I saw it in the mirror!"

His voice had risen to a strangled shriek, his face was distorted, and he shook like a child on the point of yelling aloud in an agony of fear. Helen clasped his face between her hands, and gathering courage from despair, if indeed that be a possible source of courage, and it is not gathered rather from the hidden hope of which I speak, and the love that will cleave and not forsake, she set her teeth and said :

"Let her come then, Poldie! I am with you and I defy her! She shall know that a sister's love is stronger than the hate of a jilt—even if you did kill her. Before God, Poldie, I would after all rather be you than she. Say what you will,

she had herself to blame, and I don't doubt did twenty worse things than you did when you killed her."

But Leopold seemed not to hear a word she said, and lay with his face to the wall.

At length he turned his head suddenly, and said,

"Helen, if you don't let me see Mr. Wingfold, I shall go mad, and then everything will come out."

CHAPTER LVI.

COMPELLED CONFIDENCE.

HELEN flew to the dressing-room to hide her dismay, and there cast herself on the bed. The gray fate above, or the awful Demo-gorgon beneath, would have its way! Whether it was a living Will or but the shadow of the events it seemed to order, it was too much for her. She had no choice but yield. She rose and returned to her brother.

"I am going to find Mr. Wingfold," she said in a hoarse voice, as she took her hat.

"Don't be long then, Helen," returned Leopold. "I can't bear you out of my sight. And don't let aunt come into the room. *She* might come again, you know, and then all would be out.—Bring him with you, Helen."

"I will," answered Helen, and went.

The curate might have returned; she would seek him first at his lodging. She cared nothing about appearances now.

It was a dull afternoon. Clouds had gathered, and the wind was chilly. It seemed to blow out of the church which stood up cold and gray against the sky, filling the end of the street. What a wretched, horrible world it was! She approached the church, and entered the churchyard from which it rose like a rock from the Dead Sea, a type of the true church, around whose walls lie the dead bodies of the old selves left behind by those who enter. Helen would have

envied the dead, who lay so still under its waves ; but alas ! if Leopold was right, they but roamed elsewhere in their trouble, and were no better for dying.

She hurried across, and reached the house, but Mr. Wingfold had not yet returned, and she hurried back across it again to tell Leopold that she must go farther to find him.

The poor youth was already more composed : what will not the vaguest hope sometimes do for a man ! Helen told him she had seen the curate in the park, when she was out in the morning, and he might be there still, or she might meet him coming back. Leopold only begged her to make haste. She took the road to the lodge.

She did not meet him, and it was with intense repugnance that she approached the gate.

"Is Mr. Wingfold here ?" she asked of Rachel, as if she had never spoken to her before ; and Rachel, turning paler at the sight of her, answered that he was in the garden with her uncle, and went to call him.

The moment he appeared, she said, in a tone rendered by conflicting emotions inexplicable, and sounding almost rude,

"Will you come to my brother ? He is very ill, and wants to see you."

"Certainly," returned Wingfold, "I will go with you at once."

But in his heart he trembled at the thought of being looked to for consolation and counsel—and that apparently in a case of no ordinary kind. Most likely he would not know what to say or how to behave himself ! How different it would be if with all his heart he believed the grand lovely things recorded in the book of his profession ! Then indeed he might enter the chambers of sin and fear and guilt with the innocent confidence of a winged angel of comfort and healing ! But now the eyes of his understanding were blinded with the *ifs* and *buts* that flew swarming like black *muscæ* wherever they turned. Still he would, nay, he *must* go and do his best.

They walked across the park to reach the house by the garden, and for some distance they walked in silence. At length, Helen said:

"You must not encourage my brother to talk much, if you please; and you must not mind what he says: he has had brain fever, and sometimes talks strangely. But on the other hand if he fancies you don't believe him, it will drive him wild—so you must take care—please?"

Her voice was like that of a soul trying to speak with unproved lips.

"Miss Lingard," said Wingfold, slowly and quietly—and if his voice trembled, he only was aware of it, "I cannot see your face, therefore you must pardon me if I ask you—are you quite honest with me?"

Helen's first feeling was anger. She held her peace for a time. Then she said,

"So, Mr. Wingfold!—that is the way you help the helpless!"

"How can any man help without knowing what has to be helped?" returned the curate. "The very being of his help depends upon his knowing the truth. It is very plain you do not trust me, and equally impossible I should be of any service so long as the case is such."

Again Helen held her peace. Resentment and dislike towards himself combined with terror of his anticipated counsel to render her speechless.

Her silence lasted so long that Wingfold came to the resolution of making a venture that had occurred to him more than once that morning. Had he not been convinced that a soul was in dire misery, he would not have had recourse to the seeming cruelty.

"Would this help to satisfy you that, whatever my advice may be worth, at least my discretion may be trusted!" he said.

They were at the moment passing through a little thicket in the park, where nobody could see them, and as he spoke, he took the knife-sheath from his pocket, and held it out to her.

She started like a young horse at something dead : she had never seen it, but the shape had an association. She paled, retreated a step, with a drawing back of her head and neck and a spreading of her nostrils, stared for a moment, first at the sheath, then at the curate, gave a little moan, bit her under lip hard, held out her hand, but as if she were afraid to touch the thing, and said,

"What is it? Where did you find it?"

She would have taken it, but Wingfold held it fast.

"Give it to me," she said imperatively. "It is mine. I lost it."

"There is something dark on the lining of it," said the curate, and looked straight into her eyes.

She let go her hold. But almost the same moment she snatched the sheath out of his hand and held it to her bosom, while her look of terror changed into one of defiance. Wingfold made no attempt to recover it. She put it in her pocket, and drew herself up.

"What do you mean?" she said, in a voice that was hard, yet trembled.

She felt like one that sees the vultures above him, and lifts a one movable finger in defence. Then with sudden haughtiness both of gesture and word :

"You have been acting the spy, sir!"

"No," returned the curate quietly. "The sheath was committed to my care by one whom certain facts that had come to his knowledge—certain words he had overheard—"

He paused. She shook visibly, but still would hold what ground might yet be left her.

"Why did you not give it me before?" she asked.

"In the public street, or in your aunt's presence?"

"You are cruel!" she panted. Her strength was going. "What do you know?"

"Nothing so well as that I want to serve you, and you may trust me."

"What do you mean to do?"

"My best to help you and your brother."

"But to what end?"

"To any end that is right."

"But how? What would you tell him to do?"

"You must help me to discover what he ought to do."

"Not—" she cried, clasping her hands and dropping on her knees before him, "—you *will* not tell him to give himself up? Promise me you will not, and I will tell you everything. He shall do anything you please but that! Anything but that!"

Wingfold's heart was sore at sight of her agony. He would have raised her with soothing words of sympathy and assurance, but still she cried, "Promise me you will not make him give himself up."

"I dare not promise anything," he said. "I *must* do what I may see to be right. Believe me, I have no wish to force myself into your confidence, but you have let me see that you are in great trouble and in need of help, and I should be unfaithful to my calling if I did not do my best to make you trust me."

A pause followed. Helen rose despairingly, and they resumed their walk. Just as they reached the door in the fence which would let them out upon the meadow in sight of the Manor-house, she turned to him and said,

"I will trust you, Mr. Wingfold. I mean, I will take you to my brother, and he shall do as he thinks proper."

They passed out and walked accross the meadow in silence. In the passage under the fence, as she turned from closing the door behind them, she stood and pressed her hand to her side.

"O Mr. Wingfold," she cried, "my heart will break! He has no one but me! No one but me to be mother and sister and all to him! He is *not* wicked, my poor darling!"

She caught the curate by the arm with a grasp which left its mark behind it, and gazed appealingly into his face; in the dim tomb-like light, her wide-strained eyes, white agonised countenance, and trembling, roseless lips made her look like one called back from death "to speak of horrors."

"Save him from madness," she said, in forced and unnatural utterance. "Save him from the remorse gnawing at his heart. But do not, *do* not counsel him to give himself up."

"Would it not be better you should tell me about it," said the curate, "and save him the pain and excitement?"

"I will do so, if he wishes it, not otherwise.—Come; we must not stay longer. He can hardly bear me out of his sight. I will leave you for one moment in the library, and then come to you. If you should see my aunt, not a word of all this, please. All she knows is that he has had brain-fever and is recovering only very slowly. I have never given her even a hint of anything worse. Indeed, honestly, Mr. Wingfold, I am not certain at all he did do what he will tell you. But there is his misery all the same. Do have pity on us, and don't be hard upon the poor boy. He is but a boy—only twenty."

"May God be to me as I am to him!" said Wingfold solemnly.

Helen withdrew her entreating eyes, and let go his arm. They went up into the garden and into the house.

Afterwards, Wingfold was astonished at his own calmness and decision in taking upon him—almost, as it were, dragging to him—this relation with Helen and her brother. But he had felt that not to do so would be to abandon Helen to her grief, and that for her sake he must not hesitate to encounter whatever might have to be encountered in doing so.

Helen left him in the library, as she had said, and there he waited her return in a kind of stupor, unable to think, and feeling as if he were lost in a strange and anxious dream.

CHAPTER LVII.

WILLING CONFIDENCE.

"COME," said Helen, re-entering, and the curate rose and followed her.

The moment he turned the corner of the bed and saw the face on the pillow, he knew in his soul that Helen was right, and that that was no wicked youth who lay before him—one, however, who might well have been passion-driven. There was the dark complexion and the great soft yet wild eyes that came of tropical blood. Had not Helen so plainly spoken of her brother, however, he would have thought he saw before him a woman. The worn, troubled, appealing light that overflowed rather than shone from his eyes, went straight to the curate's heart.

Wingfold had had a brother, the only being in the world he had ever loved tenderly; he had died young, and a thin film of ice had since gathered over the well of his affections; but now suddenly this ice broke and vanished, and his heart yearned over the suffering youth. He had himself been crying to God, not seldom in sore trouble, and now, ere, as it seemed, he had himself been heard, here was a sad brother crying to him for help. Nor was this all: the reading of the gospel story had roused in his heart a strange, yet most natural longing after the face of that man of whom he read such lovely things, and thence, unknown to himself,

had come a reverence and a love for his kind, which now first sprung awake to his consciousness in the feeling that drew him towards Leopold.

Softly he approached the bed, his face full of tenderness and strong pity. The lad, weak with protracted illness and mental tortures, gave one look in his face, and stretched out his arms to him. How could the curate give him but a hand? He put his arms round him as if he had been a child.

"I knew you would come," sobbed Lingard.

"What else could I do but come?" returned Wingfold.

"I have seen you somewhere before," said Lingard "—in one of my dreams, I suppose."

Then, sinking his voice to a whisper, he added:

"Do you know you came in close behind *her?* She looked round and saw you, and vanished!"

Wingfold did not even try to guess at his meaning.

"Hush, my dear fellow," he said, "I must not let you talk wildly, or the doctor might forbid my seeing you."

"I am not talking a bit wildly," returned Leopold. "I am as quiet as a mountain-top. Ah! when I *am* wild—if you saw me then, you might say so!"

Wingfold sat down on the side of the bed, and took the thin, hot hand next him in his own firm, cool one.

"Come now," he said, "tell me all about it. Or shall your sister tell me?—Come here, please, Miss Lingard."

"No, no!" cried Leopold hastily; "I will tell you myself. My poor sister could not bear to tell it you. It would kill her.—But how am I to know you will not get up and walk out the moment you have a glimpse of what is coming?"

"I would as soon leave a child burning in the fire and go out and shut the door," said Wingfold.

"You can go now, Helen," said Lingard very quietly. "Why should you be tortured over again? You needn't mind leaving me. Mr. Wingfold will take care of me."

Helen left the room, with one anxious look at her brother as she went.

Without a moment's further delay, Leopold began, and in wonderfully direct and unbroken narrative, told the sad evil tale as he had formerly told it to his sister, only more consecutively and quietly. Possibly his anxiety as to how the listener would receive it, served, by dividing him between two emotions, to keep the re-uttered tale from overpowering him with freshened vividness. All the time, he kept watching Wingfold's face, the expressions of which the curate felt those eyes were reading like a book. He was so well prepared however, that no expression of surprise, no reflex of its ghastfulness met Leopold's gaze, and he went on to the end without a pause even. When he had finished, both sat silent, looking in each other's eyes, Wingfold's beaming with compassion, and Lingard's glimmering with doubtful, anxious inquiry and appeal. At length Wingfold said :

"And what do you think I can do for you ?"

"I don't know. I thought you could tell me something. I cannot live like this ! If I had but thought before I did it, and killed myself instead of her ! It would have done so much better ! Of course I should be in hell now, but that would be all right, and this is all wromg. I have no right to be lying here and Emmeline in her grave. I know I deserve to be miserable for ever and ever, and I don't want not to be miserable—that is all right—but there is something in this wretchedness that I cannot bear. Tell me something to make me able to endure my misery. That is what you can do for me. I don't want to go mad. And what is worst of all, I have made my sister miserable, and I can't bear to see it. She is wasting away with it. And besides I fancy she loves George Bascombe—and who would marry the sister of a murderer ? And now she has begun to come to me again —in the daytime—I mean Emmeline !—or I have begun to see her again—I don't know which ;—perhaps she is always here, only I don't always see her—and it don't much matter which. Only if other people were to see her !— While she is there, nothing could persuade me I do not see her. but afterwards I am not so sure that I did. And at

night I keep dreaming the horrible thing over and over again ; and the agony is to think I shall never get rid of it, and never feel clean again. To be for ever and ever a murderer and people not know it is more than I *can* bear."

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE CURATE'S COUNSEL.

NOT seeing yet what he had to say, but knowing that scintillation the smallest is light, the curate let the talk take its natural course, and said the next thing that came to him.

"How do you feel when you think that you may yet be found out?" he asked.

"At first I was more afraid of that than of anything else. Then after that danger seemed past, I was afraid of the life to come. That fear left me next, and now it is the thing itself that is always haunting me. I often wish they would come and take me, and deliver me from myself. It would be a comfort to have it all known, and never need to start again. I think I could even bear to see *her* in the prison. If it would annihilate the deed, or bring Emmeline back, I cannot tell you how gladly I would be hanged. I would, indeed, Mr. Wingfold. I hope you will believe me, though I don't deserve it."

"I do believe you," said the curate, and a silence followed.

"There is but one thing I can say with confidence at this moment," he resumed: "it is, that I am your friend, and will stand by you. But the first part of friendship sometimes is to confess poverty, and I want to tell you that of the very things concerning which I ought to know most, I know least.

I have but lately begun to feel after God, and I dare not say that I have found him, but I think I know now where to find him. And I do think, if we could find him, then we should find help. All I can do for you now is only to be near you, and talk to you, and pray to God for you, that so together we may wait for what light may come.—Does anything ever look to you as if it would make you feel better?"

"I have no right to feel better or take comfort from anything."

"I am not sure about that.—Do you feel any better for having me come to see you?"

"Oh yes! indeed, I do!"

"Well, there is no wrong in that, is there?"

"I don't know. It seems a sneaking kind of thing: *she* has got none of it. My sister makes excuses for me, but the moment I begin to listen to them I only feel the more horrid."

"I have said nothing of that kind to you."

"No, sir."

"And yet you like to have me here?"

"Yes, indeed, sir," he answered earnestly.

"And it does not make you think less of your crime?"

"No. It makes me feel it worse than ever to see you sitting there, a clean, strong, innocent man, and think what I might have been."

"Then the comfort you get from me does you no harm, at least. If I were to find my company made you think with less hatred of your crime, I should go away that instant."

"Thank you, sir," said Leopold humbly. "O sir!" he resumed after a little silence, "to think that nevermore to all eternity shall I be able to think of myself as I used to think!"

"Perhaps you used to think too much of yourself," returned the curate. "For the greatest fool and rascal in creation there is yet a worse condition, and that is not to know it, but think himself a respectable man. As the event proves, though you would doubtless have laughed at the idea, you were then capable of committing a murder. I have come to see—at

least, I think I have—that except a man has God dwelling in him, he may be, or may become, capable of any crime within the compass of human nature."

"I don't know anything about God," said Leopold. "I daresay I thought I did before this happened—before I did it, I mean," he added in correction, "—but I know now that I don't, and never did."

"Ah! Leopold," said the curate, "think, if my coming to you comforts you, what would it be to have Him who made you always with you!"

"Where would be the good? I daresay he might forgive me, if I were to do this and that, but where would be the good of it? It would not take the thing off me one bit."

"Ah! now," said Wingfold, "I fear you are thinking a little about your own disgrace and not only of the bad you have done. Why should you not be ashamed? Would you have the shame taken off you? Nay; you must humbly consent to bear it. Perhaps your shame is the hand of love washing the defilement from off you. Ah, let us keep our shame, and be made clean from the filth!"

"I don't know that I understand you, sir. What do you mean by the defilement? Is it not to have done the deed that is the defilement?"

"Is it not rather to have that in you, a part, or all but a part, of your being, that makes you capable of doing it? If you had resisted and conquered, you would have been clean from it; and now, if you repent and God comes to you, you will yet be clean. Again I say, let us keep our shame and be made clean! Shame is not defilement, though a mean pride persuades men so. On the contrary, the man who is honestly ashamed has begun to be clean."

"But what good would that do to Emmeline? It cannot bring her up again to the bright world out of the dark grave."

"Emmeline is not in the dark grave."

"Where is she then?" he said with a ghastly look.

"That I cannot tell. I only know that, if there be a God, she is in his hands," replied the curate.

The youth gazed in his face and made no answer. Wingfold saw that he had been wrong in trying to comfort him with the thought of God dwelling in him. How was such a poor passionate creature to take that for a comfort? How was he to understand or prize the idea, who had his spiritual nature so all undeveloped? He would try another way.

"Shall I tell you what seems to me sometimes the one only thing I want to help me out of all my difficulties?"

"Yes, please, sir," answered Leopold, as humbly as a child.

"I think sometimes, if I could but see Jesus for one moment,—"

"Ah!" cried Leopold, and gave a great sigh.

"*You* would like to see him then, would you?"

"O Mr. Wingfold!"

"What would you say to him if you saw him?"

"I don't know. I would fall down on my face and hold his feet lest he should go away from me."

"Do you think then he could help you?"

"Yes. He could make Emmeline alive again. He could destroy what I have done."

"But still, as you say, the crime would remain."

"But, as you say, he could pardon that, and make me that I would never, never sin again."

"So you think the story about Jesus Christ is true?"

"Yes. Don't you?" said Leopold with an amazed, half-frightened look.

"Yes, indeed I do.—Then do you remember what he said to his disciples as he left them: *I am with you always unto the end of the world?*—If that be true, then he can hear you just as well now as ever he could. And when he was in the world, he said; "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest.*" It is rest you want, my poor boy—not deliverance from danger or shame, but rest—such peace of mind as you had when you were a child. If he cannot give you that I know not where or how it is to be had. Do not waste time in asking yourself how he can do it: that is for him to understand, not you—until it is done

Ask him to forgive you and make you clean and set things right for you. If he will not do it, then he is not the saviour of men, and was wrongly named Jesus."

The curate rose. Leopold had hid his face. When he looked again he was gone.

CHAPTER LIX.

SLEEP.

AS Wingfold came out of the room, which was near the stair, Helen rose from the top of it, where she had been sitting all the time he had been with her brother. He closed the door gently behind him, and stepped softly along the landing. A human soul in guilt and agony is an awful presence, but there was more than that in the hush of the curate; he felt as if he had left the physician of souls behind him at the bedside; that a human being lay on the rack of the truth, but at his head stood one who watched his throes with the throbs of such a human heart as never beat in any bosom but his own, and the executioners were angels of light. No wonder if with such a feeling in his breast Wingfold walked softly, and his face glistened! He was not aware that the tears stood in his eyes, but Helen saw them.

"You know all!" she faltered.

"I do. Will you let me out by the garden again! I wish to be alone."

She led the way down the stair, and walked with him through the garden. Wingfold did not speak.

"You don't think very badly of my poor brother, do you, Mr. Wingfold?" said Helen meekly.

"It is a terrible fate," he returned. "—I think I never saw a lovelier disposition.—I do hope his mind will soon be

more composed. I think he knows where alone he can find rest.—I am well aware how foolish that of which I speak seems to some minds, Miss Lingard; but when a man is once overwhelmed in his own deeds, when they have turned into spectres to mock at him, when he loathes himself and turns with sickness from past, present, and future, I know but one choice left, and that is between the death your friend Mr. Bascombe preaches and the life preached by Jesus, the crucified Jew. Into the life I hope your brother will enter."

"I am so glad you don't hate him!"

"Hate him! Who but a demon could hate him?"

Helen lifted a grateful look from eyes that swam in tears. The terror of his possible counsel for the moment vanished. He could never tell him to give himself up!

"But, as I told you, I am a poor scholar in these high matters," resumed the curate, "and I want to bring Mr. Polwarth to see him."

"The dwarf!" exclaimed Helen, shuddering at the remembrance of what she had gone through at the cottage.

"Yes. That man's soul is as grand and beautiful and patient as his body is insignificant and troubled. He is the wisest and best man I have ever known."

"I must ask Leopold," returned Helen, who, the better the man was represented, felt the more jealous and fearful of the advice he might give. Her love and her conscience were not yet at one with each other.

They parted at the door from the garden, and she returned to the sick-room.

She paused, hesitating to enter. All was still as the grave. She turned the handle softly and peeped in: could it be that Wingfold's bearing had communicated to her mind a shadow of the awe with which he had left the place where perhaps a soul was being born again? Leopold did not move. Terror laid hold of her heart. She stepped quickly in, and round the screen to the side of the bed. There, to her glad surprise, he lay fast asleep, with the tears not yet dried upon his face. Her heart swelled with some sense unknown

before : was it rudimentary thankfulness to the Father of her spirit ?

As she stood gazing with the look of a mother over her sick child, he lifted his eyelids and smiled a sad smile.

"When did you come into the room ?" he said.

"A minute ago," she answered.

"I did not hear you," he returned.

"No ; you were asleep."

"Not I ! Mr. Wingfold is only just gone."

"I have let him out on the meadow since."

Leopold started, looked half alarmed, and then said,

"Did God make me sleep, Helen ?"

She did not answer. The light of a new hope in his eye, as if the dawn had begun at last to break over the dark mountains, was already reflected from her heart.

"O Helen !" he said, "that *is* a good fellow—*such* a good fellow !"

"A pang of jealousy, the first she had ever felt, shot to her heart ; she had hitherto, since his trouble, been all in all to her Leopold ! Had the curate been a man she liked, she would not, perhaps, have minded it so much.

"You will be able to do without me now," she said sadly. "I never could understand taking to people at first sight !"

"Some people are made so, I suppose, Helen. I know I took to you at first sight ! I shall never forget the first time I saw you, when I came to this country a lonely little foreigner —and you a great beautiful lady, for such you seemed to me, though you have told me since you were only a great gawky girl—I know that could never have been—you ran to meet me, and took me in your arms and kissed me. I was as if I had crossed the sea of death and found paradise in your bosom ! I am not likely to forget you for Mr. Wingfold, good and kind and strong as he is ! Even *she* could not make me forget you, Helen. But neither you nor I can do without Mr. Wingfold any more, I fancy. I wish you liked him better !—but you will in time. You see he's not one to pay young ladies compliments, as I have heard some parsons do ; and he may be a little—no, not unpolished, not that—

that's not what I mean—but unornamental in his manners! Only, you see—"

"Only, you see, Poldie," interrupted Helen, with a smile, a rare thing between them, "you know all about him, though you never saw him before."

"That is true," returned Leopold; "but then he came to me with his door open, and let me walk in. It doesn't take long to know a man then. He hasn't got a secret like us, Helen," he added sadly.

"What did he say to you?"

"Much what he said to you from the pulpit the other day, I should think."

Then she was right! For all his hardness and want of sympathy, the curate had yet had regard to her entreaties, and was not going to put any horrid notions about duty and self-sacrifice into the poor boy's head!

"He is coming again to-morrow," added Leopold almost gleefully, "and then perhaps he will tell me more, and help me on a bit."

"Did he tell you he wants to bring a friend with him?"

"No."

"I can't see the good of taking more people into our confidence."

"Why should he not do what he thinks best, Helen? You don't interfere with the doctor, why should you with him? When a man is going to the bottom as fast as he can and another comes diving after him, it isn't for me to say how he is to take hold of me. No, Helen; when I trust, I trust out and out."

Helen sighed, thinking how ill that had worked with Emmeline.

Ever since George Bascombe had talked about the Polwarths that day they met them in the park, she had felt a kind of physical horror of them, as if they were some kind of unclean creature that ought not to be in existence at all. But when Leopold uttered himself thus, she felt that the current of events had seized her, and that she could only submit to be carried along.

CHAPTER LX.

DIVINE SERVICE.

THE next day the curate called again on Leopold. But Helen happened to be otherwise engaged for a few minutes, and Mrs. Ramshorn to be in the sick-room when the servant brought his name. With her jealousy of Wingfold's teaching, she would not have admitted him, but Lingard made such loud protest when he heard her say "Not at home," insisting on seeing him, that she had to give way and tell the maid to show him up. She *had no notion*, however, of leaving him alone in the room with the invalid: who could tell what absurd and extravagant ideas he might not put into the boy's head! He might make him turn monk, or Socinian, or Latter-day-Saint, for what she knew! So she sat, blocking up the sole small window in the youth's dark dwelling that looked eastward, and damming back the tide of the dawn from his diseased and tormented soul. Little conversation was therefore possible. Still the face of his new friend was a comfort to Leopold, and ere he left him they had managed to fix an hour for next day, when they would not be thus foiled of their talk.

That same afternoon Wingfold took the draper to see Polwarth.

Rachel was lying on a sofa in the parlour—a poor little heap, looking more like a grave disturbed by efforts at a

resurrection than a form informed with humanity. But she was cheerful and cordial, receiving Mr. Drew and accepting his sympathy most kindly.

"We'll see what God will do for me," she said in answer to a word from the curate. Her whole bearing, now as always, was that of one who perfectly trusted a supreme spirit under whose influences lay even the rugged material of her deformed dwelling.

Polwarth allowed Wingfold to help him in getting tea, and the conversation, as will be the case where all are in earnest, quickly found the right channel.

It is not often in real life that such conversations occur. Generally, in any talk worth calling conversation, every man has some point to maintain, and his object is to justify his own thesis and disprove his neighbour's. I will allow that he may primarily have adopted his thesis because of some sign of truth in it, but his mode of supporting it is generally such as to block up every cranny in his soul at which more truth might enter. In the present case, unusual as it is for so many as three truth-loving men to come thus together on the face of this planet, here were three simply set on uttering truth they had seen, and gaining sight of truth as yet veiled from them.

I shall attempt only a general impression of the result of their evening's intercourse, partly recording the utterances of Polwarth.

"I have been trying hard to follow you, Mr. Polwarth," said the draper, after his host had for a while had the talk to himself, "but I cannot get hold of your remarks. One moment I think I have got the end of the clue, and the next find myself abroad again. Would you tell me what you mean by divine service? for I think you must use the phrase in some different sense from what I have been accustomed to."

"Ah! I ought to remember," said Polwarth, "that what has grown familiar to my mind from much solitary thinking, may not at once show itself to another when presented in the forms of a foreign individuality. I ought to have pre-

mised that, when I use the phrase *divine service*, I mean nothing whatever belonging to the church or its observances. I mean by it what it ought to mean—the serving of God; the doing of something for God. Shall I make of the church, in my foolish imaginations, a temple of idolatrous worship by supposing that it is for the sake of supplying some need that God has, or of gratifying some taste in him, that I there listen to his word, say prayers to him, and sing his praises? Shall I be such a dull mule in the presence of the living Truth? Or, to use a homely simile, shall I be as the good boy of the nursery-rhyme, who, seated in his corner of selfish complacency, regards the eating of his pie as a virtuous action, enjoys the contemplation of it, and thinks what a pleasing object he thus makes of himself to his parents? Shall I, to take a step farther, degrade the sanctity of the closet, hallowed in the words of Jesus, by shutting its door in the vain fancy of there doing something that God requires of me as a sacred *observance?* Shall I foolishly imagine that to put in exercise the highest and loveliest, the most entrancing privilege of existence, that of pouring forth my whole heart into the heart of him who is *accountable for* me, who hath glorified me with his own image—in my soul, gentlemen, sadly disfigured as it is in my body!—shall I say that *that* is to do anything for God? Was I serving my father when I ate the dinner he provided for me? Am I serving my God when I eat his bread and drink his wine?"

"But," said Drew, "is not God pleased that a man should pour out his soul to him?"

"Yes, doubtless; but what would you think of a child who said, 'I am very useful to my father, for when I ask him for anything, or tell him I love him, it gives him, oh! such pleasure'?"

"I should say he was an unendurable prig. Better he had to be whipped for stealing!" said the curate.

"There would be more hope of his future," returned Polwarth. "Is the child," he continued, "who sits by his father's knee and looks up into his father's face, *serving* that father because the heart of the father delights to look down

upon his child? And shall the moment of my deepest repose and bliss, the moment when I serve myself with the very life of the universe, be called a serving of my God? It is communion with God; he holds it with me, else never could I hold it with him. I am as the foam-froth upon his infinite ocean, but of the water of the ocean is the bubble on its waves."

Not the eyes only, but the whole face of the man, which had grown of a pure, semi-transparent whiteness, appeared to Wingfold to emit light.

"When my child would serve me," he went on, "he spies out some need I have, springs from his seat at my knee, finds that which will meet my necessity, and is my eager happy servant, of consequence in his own eyes inasmuch as he has done something for his father. His seat by my knee is love, delight, well-being, peace—not service, however pleasing in my eyes. 'Why do you seat yourself at my knee, my son?' 'To please you, father.' 'Nay, then, my son! go from me, and come again when it shall be to please thyself.'—'Why do you cling to my chair, my daughter?' 'Because I want to be near you, father. It makes me so happy!' 'Come nearer still—come to my bosom, my child, and be yet happier.'—Talk not of public worship as divine service: it is a mockery. Search the prophets, and you will find the observances, fasts and sacrifices and solemn feasts, of the temple by them regarded with loathing and scorn just because by the people they were regarded as *divine service*."

"But," said Mr. Drew, while Wingfold turned towards him with some anxiety lest he should break the mood of the little prophet, "I can't help thinking I have you; for how are poor creatures like us—weak, blundering creatures, sometimes most awkward when best-intentioned—how are we to minister to a perfect God—perfect in wisdom, strength, and everything—of whom Paul says that he is not worshipped with men's hands as though he needed anything? I cannot help thinking that you are fighting merely with a word. Certainly, if the phrase ever was used in that sense,

there is no meaning of the kind attached to it now; it stands merely for the forms of public worship."

"Were there no such thing as Divine Service in the true sense of the word, then indeed it would scarcely be worth while to quarrel with its misapplication. But I assert that true and genuine service may be rendered to the living God; and for the development of the divine nature in man, it is necessary that he should do something for God. Nor is it hard to discover how; for God is in every creature that he has made, and in their needs he is needy, and in all their afflictions he is afflicted. Therefore Jesus says that whatever is done to one of his little ones is done to him. And if the soul of a man be the temple of the Spirit, then is the place of that man's labour—his shop, his counting-house, his laboratory—the temple of Jesus Christ, where the spirit of the man is incarnate in work. Mr. Drew!"—here the gatekeeper stood up and held out both his hands, palms upward, towards the draper on the other side of the table—"Mr. Drew! your shop is the temple of your service where the Lord Christ, the only image of the Father, is, or ought to be, throned; your counter is, or ought to be, his altar; and everything thereon laid, with intent of doing as well as you can for your neighbour, in the name of *the* man Christ Jesus, is a true sacrifice offered to him, a service done to the eternal creating Love of the universe."

The little prophet's head as he stood did not reach the level of the draper's as he sat, but at this Drew dropped his head on his hands upon the table as if bowed down by a weight of thought and feeling and worship.

"I say not," Polwarth went on, "that so doing you will grow a rich man, but I say that by so doing you will be saved from growing too rich, and that you will be a fellow-worker with God for the salvation of his world."

"I must live; I cannot give my goods away!" murmured Mr. Drew thinkingly, as one that sought enlightenment.

"That would be to go direct against the order of his world," said Polwarth. "No; a harder task is yours, Mr. Drew—to make your business a gain to you, and at the

same time to be not only what is commonly counted just, but interested in, and careful of, and caring for your neighbour, as a servant of the God of bounty who giveth to all men liberally. Your calling is to do your best for your neighbour that you reasonably can."

"But who is to fix what is reasonable?" asked Drew.

"The man himself, thinking in the presence of Jesus Christ. There is a holy moderation which is of God."

"There won't be many fortunes—great fortunes—made after that rule, Mr. Polwarth."

"Very few."

"Then do you say that no great fortunes have been righteously made?"

"If *righteously* means *after the fashion of Jesus Christ*—But I will not judge: that is for the God-enlightened conscience of the man himself to do, not for his neighbour's. Why should I be judged by another man's conscience? But you see, Mr. Drew—and this is what I was driving at—you have it in your power to *serve* God through the needs of his children all the working day, from morning to night, so long as there is a customer in your shop."

"I do think you are right, sir," said the linen-draper. "I had a glimpse of the same thing the other night myself. And yet it seems as if you spoke of a purely ideal state—one that could not be realised in this world."

"Purely ideal or not, one thing is certain: it will never be reached by one who is so indifferent to it as to believe it impossible. Whether it may be reached in this world or not, that is a question of *no* consequence; whether a man has begun to *reach after* it is of the utmost awfulness of import. And should it be ideal, which I doubt, what else than the ideal have the followers of the ideal man to do with?"

"Can a man reach anything ideal before he has God dwelling in him, filling every cranny of his soul?" asked the curate, with shining eyes.

"Nothing, I do most solemnly believe," answered Polwarth. "It weighs on me heavily sometimes," he resumed, after a pause, "to think how far all but a few are from being

able even to entertain the idea of the indwelling in them of the original power of their life. True, God is in every man, else how could he live the life he does live? But that life God keeps alive for the hour when he shall inform the will, the aspiration, the imagination of the man. When the man throws wide his door to the Father of his spirit, when his individual being is thus supplemented—to use a poor, miserable word—with the individuality that originated it, then is the man a whole, healthy, complete existence. Then indeed, and then only, will he do no wrong, think no wrong, love perfectly, and be right merry. Then will he scarce think of praying, because God is in every thought and enters anew with every sensation. Then he will forgive and endure, and pour out his soul for the beloved who yet grope their way in doubt and passion. Then every man will be dear and precious to him, even the worst; for in him also lies an unknown yearning after the same peace wherein he rests and loves."

He sat down suddenly, and a deep silence filled the room.

CHAPTER LXI.

A SHOP IN HEAVEN.

"UNCLE," said Rachel, "may I read your vision of the shops in heaven?"

"Oh! no, Rachel. You are not able to read to-night," said her uncle deprecatingly.

"I think I am, uncle. I should like to try. It will let the gentlemen see what you *would* think an ideal state of things.—It is something, Mr. Wingfold, my uncle once dictated to me, and I wrote down just as he said it. He can always do better dictating than writing, but this time he was so ill with asthma that he could not talk much faster than I could write; and yet to be so ill I never saw him show so little suffering; his thinking seemed to make him forget it.—Mayn't I read it, uncle? I know the gentlemen would like to hear it."

"That we should," said both the men at once.

"I will fetch it to you, then," said Polwarth, "if you will tell me where to find it."

Rachel gave him the needful directions, and presently he brought a few sheets of paper and handed them to her.

"This is no dream, Mr. Wingfold," he said. "It is something I had thought fairly out before I began to dictate it. But the only fit form I could find for it was that of a vision—like the Vision of Mirza, you know.—Now read, Rachel, and I will hold my tongue."

After a little arranging of the sheets, Rachel began. She read not without difficulty, but her pleasure in what she read helped her through.

"'"And now," said my guide to me, "I will bring thee to a city of the righteous, and show thee how they buy and sell in this the kingdom of heaven." So we journeyed a day and another day and half a day, and I was weary ere we arrived thither. But when I saw the loveliness of the place and drew in the healing air thereof, my weariness vanished as a dream of the night, and I said, *It is well*, I may not now speak of the houses and the dress and the customs of the dwellers therein, save what may belong to the buying and selling of which I have spoken. Gladly would I tell of the streams that went, some noiselessly gliding, others gurgling, some sweeping, some rushing and roaring, through every street, all issuing from one right plenteous fountain in the middle of the city, so that the ear was for ever filled with the sound of many waters all the day, ceasing when the night came that silence might have its perfect work upon the soul. Gladly, too, would I tell of the trees and flowers and grass that grew in every street along the banks of the rivers. But I must withhold.

"'After I had, I know not for how long, refreshed my soul with what it was thus given me to enjoy—for in all that country there is no such thing as haste, no darting from one thing to another, but a calm, eternal progress in which unto the day the good thereof is sufficient—one great noon-day my conductor led me into a large place such as we would call a shop here, although the arrangements were different, and an air of stateliness dwelt in and around the house. It was filled with the loveliest silken and woollen stuffs, of all kinds and colours, a thousand delights to the eye—and to the thought also, for here was endless harmony and no discord.

"'I stood in the midst, and my guide stood by me in silence; for all the time I was in the country he seldom spoke to me save when first I asked of him, and yet he never showed any weariness, and often a half-smile would dwell for a moment upon his countenance.

"'And first I watched the faces of them that sold; and I could read therein—for be it understood that, according to the degree of his own capacity, a man there could perfectly read the countenance of every neighbour; that is, except it expressed something that was not in himself—I could read in them nothing of eagerness, but only the calm of a concentrated ministration. There was no seeking there, but a strength of giving, a business-like earnestness to supply lack, enlivened by no haste and dulled by no weariness, brightened ever by the reflected content of those who found their wants supplied. As soon as one buyer was contented they turned graciously to another, and gave ear until they perfectly understood with what object he had come to seek their aid. Nor did their countenances change utterly as they turned away, for upon them lingered the satisfaction as of one who hath had a success, and by degrees melted into the supervening content.

"'Then I turned to watch the countenances of them that bought. And there in like manner I saw no cupidity and no meanness. They spake humbly, yet not because they sought a favour, but because they were humble; for with their humility was mingled the confidence of receiving that they sought. And truly it was a pleasure to see how every one knew what his desire was, making his choice readily and with decision. I perceived also that every one spoke not merely respectfully, but gratefully, to him who served him. And at meeting and parting, such kindly though brief greetings passed as made me wonder whether every inhabitant of such a mighty city could know every other that dwelt therein. But I soon saw that it came not of individual knowledge, but of universal faith and all-embracing love.

"'And as I stood and watched, suddenly it came into my mind that I had never yet seen the coin of the country, and thereupon I kept my eyes upon a certain woman who bought silk, that when she paid for the same I might see the money. But that which she had largely bought, she took in her arms and carried away, and paid not. Therefore I turned to watch another, who bought for a long journey, but when

he carried away what he bought neither did he pay any money. And I said to myself, "These are well-known persons, to whom it is more convenient to pay at a certain season;" and I turned to a third, who bought much fine linen. But behold! he paid not! Then I began to observe again those that sold; whereupon I thought with myself, "How good must be the air of this land for the remembrance of things! for these men write down nothing to keep on record the moneys men owe them on all sides." And I looked and looked again and yet again, and stood long watching; but so it was throughout the whole place, which thronged and buzzed and swarmed like the busiest of beehives—no man paid, and no man had a book wherein to write that which the other owed!

"'Then I turned to my guide and said, "How lovely is honesty! and truly from what a labour it absolveth men! for here I see every man keepeth in his mind his own debts and not the debts of others, so that time is not spent in the paying of small sums, neither in the keeping of account of such; but he that buyeth counteth up, and doubtless, when the day of reckoning arrives, each cometh and casteth the money he oweth into the merchant's coffer, and both are satisfied."

"'Then my conductor smiled, and said, "Watch yet awhile."

"'And I did as he said unto me, and stood and watched. But the same thing went on everywhere; and I said to myself, "Lo! I see nothing new!" Suddenly, at my side, a man dropped upon his knees and bowed his head to the ground. And those that stood nigh him dropped also upon their knees, and there arose a sound as of soft thunder; and lo! every one in the place had dropped upon his knees and spread his hands out before him. Every voice and every noise was hushed, every movement had ceased, and I and my guide alone were left standing.

"'Then I whispered in his ear, "It is the hour of prayer: shall we not kneel also?" And my guide answered, "No man in this city kneeleth because others do, and no man is judged if he kneeleth not. If thou hast any grief or pain

upon thee, then kneel; if not, then love God in thy heart and be thankful, and kneel when thou goest into thy chamber." Then said I, "I will not kneel, but will watch and see." "It is well," said my guide; and I stood.

"'For certain moments all was utter stillness—every man and woman kneeling, with hands outstretched, save him who had first kneeled, and his hands hung by his sides and his head was still bowed to the earth. At length he rose up, and lo! his face was wet with tears; and all the people rose also, with a noise throughout the place; and the man made a low obeisance to them that were nigh him, the which they returned with equal reverence, and then, with downcast eyes, he walked slowly from the shop. The moment he was gone, the business of the place, without a word of remark on any side concerning what had passed, began again as before. People came and went, some more eager and outward, some more staid and inward, but all contented and cheerful. At length a bell somewhere rang sweet and shrill, and after that no one entered the place, and what was in progress began to be led to a decorous conclusion. In three or four minutes the floor was empty, and the people also of the shop had gone, each about his own affairs, without shutting door or window.

"'I went out last with my guide, and we seated ourselves under a tree of the willow kind on the bank of one of the quieter streams, and straightway I began to question him. "Tell me, sir," I said, "the purport of what I have seen; for not yet have I understood how these happy people do their business and pass from hand to hand not a single coin." And he answered, "Where greed and ambition and self-love rule, money must be; where there is neither greed nor ambition nor self-rule, money is needless." And I asked, "Is it then by the same ancient mode of barter that they go about their affairs? truly I saw no exchange of any sort." "Bethink thee," said my guide, "if thou hadst gone into any other shop throughout the whole city, thou wouldst have seen the same thing." "I see not how that should make the matter plainer to me," I answered. "Where neither greed nor ambition nor selfishness reigneth," said my guide, "there

need and desire have free scope, for they work no evil." "But even now I understand you not, sir," I said. "Hear me, then," answered my guide, "for I will speak to thee more plainly. Wherefore do men take money in their hands when they go where things are?" "Because they may not have the things without giving the money." "And where they may have things without giving money, there they take no money in their hands?" "Truly no, sir, if there be such a place." "Then such a place is this, and so is it here." "But how can men give of their goods and receive naught in return?" "By receiving everything in return. Tell me," said my guide, "why do men take money for their goods?" "That they may have wherewithal to go and buy other things which they need for themselves." "But if they also may go to this place or that place where the things are the which they need, and receive of those things without money and without price, is there then good cause why they should take money in their hands?" "Truly no," I answered; "and I begin, methinks, to see how the affair goeth. Yet are there some things still whereupon I would gladly be resolved. And first of all, how cometh it that men are moved to provide these and those goods for the supply of the wants of their neighbours when they are drawn thereto by no want in themselves and no advantage to themselves?" "Thou reasonest," said my guide, "as one of thine own degree, who to the eyes of the full-born ever look like chrysalids, closed round in a web of their own weaving; and who shall blame thee until thou thyself shinest within thyself? Understand that it is never advantage to himself that moveth a man in this kingdom to undertake this or that. The thing that alone advantageth a man here is the thing which doth without thought unto that advantage. To your world, this world goeth by contraries. The man here that doeth most service, that aideth others the most to the obtaining of their honest desires, is the man who standeth highest with the Lord of the place, and his reward and honour is to be enabled to the spending of himself yet more for the good of his fellows. There goeth a rumour amongst us even now that one shall

erelong be ripe for the carrying of a message from the King to the spirits that are in prison. Thinkest thou it is a less potent stirring up of thought and energy to desire and seek and find the things that will please the eye and cheer the brain and gladden the heart of the people of this great city, so as when one prayeth, *Give me, friend, of thy loaves*, a man may answer, *Take of them, friend, as many as thou needest*—is that, I say, an incentive to diligence less potent than the desire to hoard or to excel? Is it not to share the bliss of God who hoardeth nothing, but ever giveth liberally? The joy of a man here is to enable another to lay hold upon that which is of his own kind and be glad and grow thereby—doctrine strange and unbelievable to the man in whom the well of life is yet sealed. Never have they been many at a time in the old world who could thus enter into the joy of their Lord. And yet, if thou bethink thee, thou wilt perceive that such bliss is not unknown amongst thy fellows. Knowest thou no musician who would find it joy enough for a night to scale the tower of a hundred bells, and send the great meteors of music-light flying over the care-tortured city? Would every one even of thy half-created race reason with himself and say, 'Truly it is in the night, and no one can see who it is that ministereth; the sounds alone will go forth nor bear my image; I shall reap no honour; I will not rise and go'? Thou knowest, I say, some in thy world who would not speak thus in their hearts, but would willingly consent to be as nothing, so to give life to their fellows. In this city so is it with all—in shop or workshop, in study or theatre, all seek to spend and be spent for the lovely all." And I said, "One thing tell me, sir: how much a man may have for the asking." "What he will—that is, what he can well use." "Who then shall be the judge thereof?" "Who but the man himself?" "What if he should turn to greed, and begin to hoard and spare?" "Sawest thou not the man this day because of whom all business ceased for a time? To that man had come a thought of accumulation instead of growth, and he dropped upon his knees in shame and terror. And thou sawest how all business ceased, and

straightway that of the shop was made what below they call a church ; for every one hastened to the poor man's help, the air was filled with praying breath, and the atmosphere of God-loving souls was around him ; the foul thought fled, and the man went forth glad and humble, and to-morrow he will return for that which he needeth. If thou shouldst be present then thou wilt see him more tenderly ministered unto than all the rest." "And if such a man prayed not?" "If such a man slept ere he repented, he would wake with hatred in his heart toward the city and every one therein, and would straightway flee into the wilderness. And the angel of the Lord would go out after him and smite him with a word, and he would vanish from amongst us, and his life would be the life of one of those least of living things that are in your world born of the water ; and there must he grow up again, crawling through the channels of thousand-folded difference, from animal to animal, until at length a human brain be given him, and after generations he become once again capable of being born of the spirit into the kingdom of liberty. Then shall all his past life open upon him, and in shame and dismay will he repent a thousand-fold, and will sin no more. Such, at least, are the thoughts of our wise men upon the matter ; but truly we know not." "It is good," I said. "But how are men guided as to what lies to them to provide for the general good?" "Every man doeth what thing he can, and the more his labour is desired the more he rejoices." "If a man should desire that he could nowhere find in the city?" "Then he would straightway do his endeavour to provide that thing for all in the city who might after him desire the same." "Now, sir, methinks I know and understand," I answered. And we rose and went further.'"

"I think that *could* be!" said the curate, breaking the silence that followed when Rachel ceased.

"Not in this world," said the draper.

"To doubt that it *could* be," said the gate-keeper, "would be to doubt whether the kingdom of heaven is a chimera or a divine idea."

CHAPTER LXII.

POLWARTH AND LINGARD.

THE morning after Wingfold's second visit Lingard—much to his sister's surprise, partly to her pleasure, and somewhat to her consternation—asked for his clothes: he wanted to get up. So little energy had he hitherto shown, so weak was he, and so frequent had been the symptoms of returning fever, that the doctor had not yet thought of advising more than an hour's sitting while his bed was made comfortable. And Helen had felt that she had him, if not safe, yet safer in bed than he could be elsewhere.

His wish to rise was a sign that he was getting better. But could she wish him to get better, seeing every hour threatened to be an hour of torture? On the other hand she could not but hope that, for the last day or so, his mind had been a little more at ease. Assuredly the light in his eye was less troubled: perhaps he saw prospect of such mental quiet as might render life endurable.

He declined assistance, and Helen, having got him every thing he required, left the room to wait within hearing. It took him a long time to dress, but he had resolved to do it himself, and at length called Helen.

She found he looked worse in his clothes—fearfully worn and white. Ah! what a sad ghost he was of his former sunny self! Helen turned her eyes from him that he might

not see how changed she thought him, and there were the trees in the garden, and the meadows and the park beyond, bathing in the strength of the sun betwixt the blue sky and the green earth! "What a hideous world it is!" she said to herself. She was not yet persuaded, like her cousin, that it was the best possible world—only that, unfortunately, not much was possible in worlds.

"Will you get me something, Helen?" he said. "Mr. Wingfold will be here, and I want to be able to talk to him."

It was the first time he had asked for food, though he had seldom refused to take what she brought him. She made him lie on the couch, and gave orders that if Mr. Wingfold called, he should be shown up at once. Leopold's face brightened; he actually looked pleased when his soup came. When Wingfold was announced, he grew for a moment radiant.

Helen received the curate respectfully, but not very cordially: *she* could not make Leopold's face shine!

"Would your brother like to see Mr. Polwarth?" asked the curate rather abruptly.

"I will see any one you would like me to see, Mr. Wingfold," answered Lingard for himself, with a decision that strongly indicated returning strength.

"But, Leopold, you know that it is hardly to be desired," suggested Helen, "that more persons—"

"I don't know that," interrupted Leopold, with strange expression.

"Perhaps I had better tell you, Miss Lingard," said the curate, "that it was Mr. Polwarth who found the thing I gave you. After your visit, he could not fail to put things together; and had he been a common man, I should have judged it prudent to tell him for the sake of secrecy what I have told him for the sake of counsel. I repeat in your brother's hearing what I said to you, that he is the wisest and best man I have ever known. I left him in the meadow at the foot of the garden. He is suffering to-day, and I wanted to save him the longer walk. If you will allow me, I will go and bring him in."

"Do," said Leopold. "Think, Helen! If he is the wisest and best man Mr. Wingfold ever knew! Tell him where to find the key."

"I will go myself," she said, with a yielding to the inevitable.

When she opened the door, there was the little man seated, a few yards off, on the grass. He had plucked a cowslip, and was looking into it so intently that he neither heard nor saw her.

"Mr. Polwarth!" said Helen.

He lifted his eyes, rose, and, taking off his hat, said, with a smile,

"I was looking into the cowslip for the spots which the fairy in the Midsummer Night's Dream calls *rubies*. How is your brother, Miss Lingard?"

Helen answered with cold politeness, and led the way up the garden with considerably more stateliness of demeanour than was necessary.

When he followed her into the room,

"This is Mr. Polwarth, Leopold," said the curate, rising respectfully. "You may speak to him as freely as to me, and he is far more able to give you counsel than I am."

"Would you mind shaking hands with me, Mr. Polwarth?" said Leopold, holding out his shadowy hand.

Polwarth took it, with the kindest of smiles, and held it a moment in his.

"You think me an odd-looking creature, don't you?" he said; "but just because God made me so I have been compelled to think about things I might have otherwise have forgotten, and that is why Mr. Wingfold would have me come to see you."

The curate placed a chair for him, and the gatekeeper sat down. Helen seated herself a little way off in the window, pretending—hardly more—to hem a handkerchief. Leopold's big eyes went wandering from one to the other of the two men.

"What a horrible world it is!" was the thought that kept humming on like an evil insect in Helen's heart.

"I am sorry to see you suffer so much," said Leopold kindly, for he heard the laboured breath of the little man, and saw the heaving of his chest.

"It does not greatly trouble me," returned Polwarth. "It is not my fault, you see," he added, with a smile; "at least I don't think it is."

"You are happy to suffer without fault," said Leopold. "It is because it is just that my punishment seems greater than I can bear."

"You need God's forgiveness in your soul."

"I don't see how that should do anything for me."

"I do not mean it would take away your suffering; but it would make you able to bear it. It would be fresh life in you."

"I can't see why it should. I can't feel that I have wronged God. I have been trying to feel it, Mr. Wingfold, ever since you talked to me. But I don't know God, and I only feel what I have done to Emmeline. If I said to God, *Pardon me*, and he said to me, *I do pardon you*, I should feel just the same. What could that do to set anything right that I have set wrong? I am what I am and what I ever shall be, and the injury which came from me cleaves fast to her, and is my wrong wherever she is."

He hid his face in his hands.

"What use *can* it be to torture the poor boy so?" said Helen to herself.

The two men sat silent. Then Polwarth said,

"I doubt if there is any use in trying to feel. And no amount of trying could enable you to imagine what God's forgiveness is like to those that have it in them. Tell me something more you do feel, Mr. Lingard."

"I feel that I could kill myself to bring her back to life."

"That is, you would kindly make amends for the wrong you have done her."

"I would give my life, my soul, to do it."

"And there is nothing you can do for it?"

Helen began to tremble.

"What is there that can be done?" answered Leopold

"It does seem hard that a man should be made capable of doing things that he is not made capable of undoing again."

"It is indeed a terrible thought! And even the smallest wrong is, perhaps, too awful a thing for created being ever to set right again."

"You mean it takes God to do that?"

"I do."

"I don't see how he could ever set some things right."

"He would not be God if he could not or would not do for his creature what that creature cannot do for himself, and must have done for him or lose his life."

"Then he isn't God, for he can't help me."

"Because you don't see what can be done you say God can do nothing—which is as much as to say there cannot be more within his scope than there is within yours! One thing is clear: that if he saw no more than lies within your ken, he could not be God. The very impossibility you see in the thing points to the region wherein God works."

"I don't quite understand you. But it don't matter. It's all a horrible mess. I wish I were dead."

"My dear sir, is it reasonable that because a being so capable of going wrong finds himself incapable of setting right, he should judge it useless to cry to that Being who called him into being to come to his aid, and that in the face of the story—if it be but an old legend, worn and disfigured—that he took upon himself our sins?"

Leopold hung his head.

"God needs no making up to him," the gate-keeper went on; "so far from it that he takes our sins on himself that he may clear them out of the universe. How could he say that he took our sins upon him if he could not make amends for them to those they had hurt?"

"Ah!" cried Leopold, with a profound sigh, "if that could be! if he could really do that!"

"Why, of course he can do that!" said Polwarth. "What sort of watch-maker were he who could not set right the watches and clocks himself made?"

"But the hearts of men and women!—"

"Which God does far more than make!" interposed Polwarth. "That a being able to make another self-conscious being distinct from himself, should be able also to set right whatever that being could set wrong seems to me to follow of simple necessity. He might even, should that be fit, put the man himself in the way of making up for what he had done, or at least put it in his power to ask and receive a forgiveness that would set all right between him and the person wronged. One of the painful things in the dogma of the endless loss of the wicked is that it leaves no room for the righteous to make up to them for the wrongs they did them in this life. For the righteous do the wicked far more wrong than they think—the righteous being all the time, in reality, the wealthy, and the wicked the poor. But it is a blessed word, that there are first that shall be last, and last that shall be first."

Helen stared. This last sounded to her mere raving madness, and she thought how wrong she had been to allow such fanatics to gain power over her poor Leopold—who sat before them whiter than ever, and with what she took for a wilder gleam in his eye.

"Is there not the might of love, and all eternity for it to work in, to set things right?" ended Polwarth.

"O God!" cried Leopold, "if that might be true! That would be a gift indeed—the power to make up for the wrong I have done!"

He rose from the couch—slowly, sedately, I had almost said formally, like one with a settled object—and stood erect, swaying a little from weakness.

"Mr. Wingfold," he said, "I want of you one more favour: will you take me to the nearest magistrate? I wish to give myself up."

Helen started up and came forward, paler than the sick man.

"Mr. Wingfold! Mr. Polwarth!" she said, and turned from the one to the other, "the boy is not himself. You will never allow him to do such a mad thing!"

"It may be the right thing," said the curate to Leopold, "but we must not act without consideration."

"I have considered and considered it for days—for weeks," returned Leopold; "but until this moment I never had the courage to resolve on the plainest of duties. Helen, if I were to go up to the throne of God with the psalm in my mouth, and say to him, 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,' it would be false; for I have sinned against every man, woman, and child in England at least, and I will repudiate myself. To the throne of God I want to go, and there is no way thither for me but through the gate of the law."

"Leopold!" pleaded Helen as if for her own life with some hard judge, "what good can it do to send another life after the one that is gone? It cannot bring it back or heal a single sorrow for its loss."

"Except, perhaps, my own," said Leopold in a feeble voice, but not the less in a determined tone.

"Live till God sends for you," persisted Helen, heedless of his words. "You can give your life to make up for the wrong you have done in a thousand better ways: that would be but to throw it in the dirt! There is so much good waiting to be done!"

Leopold sank on the couch.

"I am sitting down again, Helen, only because I am not able to stand," he said. "I *will* go. Don't talk to me about doing good! Whatever I touched I should but smear with blood. I want the responsibility of my own life taken off me. I am like the horrible creature Frankenstein made—one that has no right to existence—and at the same time like the maker of it, who is accountable for that existence. I am a blot on God's creation that must be wiped off. For this my strength is given back to me, and I am once more able to will and resolve. You will find I can act too. Helen, if you will indeed be my sister, you must *not* prevent me now. I know it is hard upon you, awfully hard. I know I am dragging your life down with mine, but I cannot help it. If I don't do it, I shall but go out of one madness into another, ever a deeper, until the devils can't hold me. Mr. Polwarth, is it not my duty to give myself up? Ought not

the evil thing to be made manifest and swept out of the earth? Most people grant it a man's first duty to take care of his life: that is the only thing I can do for mine. It is now a filthy pool with a corpse in it: I would clean it out; have the thing buried at least, though never forgotten—never, never forgotten. Then I shall die and go to God and see what he can do for me."

"Why should you put it off till then?" said Polwarth. "Why not go to him at once and tell him all?"

As if it had been Samuel at the command of Eli, Leopold rose and crept feebly across the floor to the dressing-room, entered it and closed the door.

Then Helen turned upon Wingfold with a face white as linen and eyes flashing with troubled wrath. The tigress-mother swelled in her heart, and she looked like a Mænad indeed.

"Is this then your religion?" she cried, with quivering nostril. "Would he you dare to call your master have stolen into the house of a neighbour to play upon the weakness of a poor lad suffering from brain-fever? A fine trophy of your persuasive power and priestly craft you would make of him! What is it to you whether he confesses his sins or not? If he confesses them to him you say is your God, is not that enough? For shame, gentlemen!"

She ceased, and stood trembling and flashing—a human thunder-cloud. Neither of the men cared to assert innocence, because, although they had not advised the step, they entirely approved of it.

A moment more, and her anger suddenly went out. She burst into tears, and falling on her knees before the curate, begged and prayed like a child condemned to some frightful punishment. It was terrible to Wingfold to see a woman in such an agony of prayer to one who would not grant it—and that one himself. In vain he sought to raise her.

"If you do not save Leopold, I will kill myself," she cried, "and my blood will be on your head."

"The only way to save your brother is to strengthen him to do his duty, whatever that may be."

The hot-fit of her mental labour returned. She sprang to her feet, and her face turned again, almost like that of a corpse, with pale wrath.

"Leave the house!" she said, turning sharply upon Polwarth, who stood solemn and calm at Wingfold's side, a step behind. It was wonderful what an unconscious dignity radiated from him.

"If my friend goes, I go too," said Wingfold. "But I must first tell your brother why."

He made a step towards the dressing-room.

But now came a fresh change of mood upon Helen. She darted between him and the door, and stood there with such a look of humble entreaty as went to his very heart and all but unmanned him. Ah! how lovely she looked in the silent prayer of tears! But not even her tears could turn Wingfold from what seemed his duty. They could only bring answering tears from the depth of a tender heart. She saw he would not flinch.

"Then may God do to you as you have done to me and mine!" she said.

"Amen!" returned Wingfold and Polwarth together.

The door of the dressing-room opened, and out came Leopold, his white face shining.

"God has heard me!" he cried.

"How do you know that?" said his sister, in the hoarse accents of unbelieving despair.

"Because he has made me strong to do my duty. He has reminded me that another man may be accused of my crime, and now to conceal myself were to double my baseness."

"It will be time enough to think of that when there is a necessity for it. The thing you imagine may never happen," said Helen in the same unnatural voice.

"Leave it," cried Leopold, "until an innocent man shall have suffered the torture and shame of a false accusation, that a guilty man may a little longer act the hypocrite! No, Helen, I have not fallen so low as that yet. Believe me, this is the only living hour I have had since I did the deed!"

But as he spoke, the light died out of his face; and ere they could reach him, he had fallen heavily on the floor.

"You have killed him!" cried Helen, in a stifled shriek; for all the time she had never forgotten that her aunt might hear.

But the same moment she caught from his condition a lurid hope.

"Go, I beg of you," she said, "by the window there, before my aunt comes. She must have heard the fall. There is the key of the door below."

The men obeyed, and left the house in silence.

It was some time before Leopold returned to consciousness. He made no resistance to being again put to bed, where he lay in extreme exhaustion.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE STRONG MAN.

THE next day he was still much too exhausted and weak to talk about anything. He took what his sister brought him, smiled his thanks, and once put up his hand and stroked her cheek. But her heart was not gladdened by these signs of comparative composure, for what gave him quiet but the same that filled her with unspeakable horror?

The day after that was Saturday, and George Bascombe came as usual. The sound of his step in the hall made her dying hope once more flutter its wings: having lost the poor stay of the parson, from whom she had never expected much, she turned, in her fresh despair, to her cousin, from whom she had never looked for anything. But what was she to say to him? Nothing yet, she resolved; but she would take him to see Leopold; for was he not sure to hear that the parson had been admitted? She did not feel at all that she was doing right, but she would do it; and if she left them together, possibly George might drop some good *practical* advice, which, though spoken in ignorance, might yet tell. George was such a healthy nature and such a sound thinker! Was it not as ridiculous as horrible for any man to think that he had a right to throw away his very existence, and bring disgrace upon his family as well, for a mere point of honour—no, not honour, mere fastidiousness?

Leopold was better, and willing enough to see George, saying only,

"I would rather it were Mr. Wingfold. But he can't come to-day, I suppose, to-morrow being Sunday."

George's entrance brought with it a waft of breezy health and a show of bodily vigour pleasant and refreshing to the heart of the invalid. Kindness shone in his eyes, and his large, handsome hand was out as usual while he was yet yards away. It swallowed up that of poor Leopold, and held it fast.

"Come, come, old fellow! what's the meaning of this?" he said right cheerily. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself—lying in bed like this in such weather! Why ain't you riding in the park with Helen instead of moping in this dark room? You'll be as blind as the fish in the cave of Kentucky if you don't get out of this directly! We must see what we can do to get you up!"

He glanced round the room, saw that Helen had left it, and changed his tone to a lower and more serious one:

"I say, my boy, you must have been playing old Harry with your constitution to bring yourself to such a pass! By Jove! this will never do! You must turn over a new leaf, you know. That sort of thing never pays. The game's not worth the candle. Why, you've been at death's door, and life's not so long that you can afford to play ducks and drakes with it."

Thus he talked, in expostulatory rattle, the very high-priest of social morality, for some time before Leopold could get a word in. But when he did, it turned the current into quite another channel.

An hour passed, and George reappeared in the drawing-room, where Helen was waiting for him. He looked very grave.

"I fear matters are worse with poor Leopold than I had imagined," he said.

Helen gave a sad nod of acquiescence.

"He's quite off his head," continued George, "—telling me such an awful cock-and-bull story with the greatest

gravity! He *will* have it that he is a murderer—the murderer of that very girl I was telling you about, you remember—"

"Yes, yes! I know," said Helen, as a faint gleam of reviving hope shot up from below her horizon. George took the whole thing for a sick fancy, and who was likely to know better than he—a lawyer, and skilled in evidence? Not a word would she say to interfere with such an opinion!

"I hope you gave him a good talking to," she said.

"Of course I did," he answered; "but it was of no use. I see exactly how it is. He gave me a full and circumstantial account of the affair, filling up all the gaps, it is true, but going only just as far as the newspapers supplied the skeleton. How he got away, for instance, he could not tell me. And now nothing will serve him but confess it! He don't care who knows it! He's as mad as a hatter!—I beg your pardon, Helen—on that one point, I mean. The moment I saw him I read madness in his eye. What's to be done now?"

"George, I look to you," said Helen. "Poor aunt is no use. Think what will become of her if the unhappy boy should attempt to give himself up! We should be the talk of the country—of the whole county!"

"Why didn't you tell me of this before, Helen? It must have been coming on for some time."

"George, I didn't know what to do. And I had heard you say such terrible things about the duty of punishing crime."

"Good gracious! Helen, where is your logic? What has crime to do with it? Is downright stark, staring madness a crime? Any one with half an eye can see the boy is mad!"

Helen saw she had made a slip, and held her peace. George went on:

"He ought to be shut up."

"No! no! no!" Helen almost screamed, and covered her face with her hands.

"I've done my best to persuade him. But I will have

another try. That a fellow is out of his mind is no reason why he should be unassailable by good logic—that is, if you take him on his own admissions."

"I fear you will make nothing of him, George. He is set upon it, and I don't know what *is* to be done."

George got up, went back to Leopold, and plied him with the very best of arguments. But they were of no avail. There was but one door out of hell, and that was the door of confession—let what might lie on the other side of it.

"Who knows," he said, "but the law of *a life for a life* may have come of compassion for the murderer?"

"Nonsense!" said George. "It comes of the care of society over its own constituent parts."

"Whatever it came from, I know this," returned Leopold, "that since I made up my mind to confess, I am a man again."

George was silent. He found himself in that rare condition for him—perplexity. It would be most awkward if the thing came to be talked of! Some would even be fools enough to believe the story! Entire proof of madness would only make such set it down as the consequence—or if pity prevailed, then as the cause—of the deed. They might be compelled to shut him up to avoid no end of the most frightful annoyances. But Helen, he feared, would not consent to that. And then his story was so circumstantial—and therefore so far plausible—that there was no doubt most magistrates would be ready at once to commit him for trial—and then where would there be an end of the most offensive embarrassments?

Thus George reflected uneasily. But at length an idea struck him.

"Well," he said lightly, "if you will, you will. We must try to make it as easy for you as we can. I will manage it, and go with you. I know all about such things, you know. But it won't do just to-day. If you were to go before a magistrate looking as you do now, he would not listen to a word you uttered. He would only fancy you in a fever, and send you to bed. If you are quiet to-day—let me see: to-

morrow is Sunday—and if you are in the same mind on Monday, I will take you to Mr. Hooker—he's one of the county magistrates—and you shall make your statement to him."

"Thank you. I should like Mr. Wingfold to go too."

"So!" said George to himself. "By all means," he answered. "We can take him with us."

He went again to Helen.

"This is a most awkward business," he said. "Poor girl! what you must have gone through with him! I had no idea! But I see my way out of it. Keep your mind easy, Helen. I do see what I can do. Only, what's the meaning of his wanting that fellow Wingfold to go with him? I shouldn't a bit wonder now if it all came of some of his nonsense! At least it may be that ass of a curate that has put confession in his head—to save his soul, of course! How did he come to see him?"

'The poor boy would see him."

"What made him want to see him?"

Helen held her peace. She saw George suspected the truth.

"Well, no matter," said George. "But one never knows what may come of things. We ought always to look well ahead. You had better go and lie down a while, Helen: you don't seem quite yourself."

"I am afraid to leave Leopold," she answered. "He will be telling aunt and everybody now."

"That I will take care he does not," said George. "You go and lie down a while."

Helen's strength had been sorely tried; she had borne up bravely to the last; but now that she could do no more, and her brother had taken himself out of her hands, her strength had begun to give way, and, almost for the first time in her life, in daylight, she longed to go to bed. Let George, or Wingfold, or who would, see to the wilful boy; she had done what she could.

She gladly yielded to George's suggestion, sought an unoccupied room, bolted the door, and threw herself upon the bed.

CHAPTER LXIV.

GEORGE AND LEOPOLD.

GEORGE went again to Leopold's room, and sat down by him. The youth lay with his eyes half closed, and a smile—a faint, sad one—flickered over his face. He was asleep: from infancy he had slept with his eyes open.

"Emmeline!" he murmured, in the tone of one who entreats forgiveness.

"Strange infatuation!" said George to himself. "Even his dreams are mad. Good God! there can't be anything in it, can there? I begin to feel as if I were not quite safe myself. Mad-doctors go mad themselves they say. I wonder what sort of floating sporule carries the infection—reaching the brain by the nose, I fancy. Or perhaps there is latent madness in us all, requiring only the presence of another madness to set it free."

Leopold was awake and looking at him.

"Is it a very bad way of dying?" he asked.

"What is, old boy?"

"Hanging."

"Yes, very bad—choking, you know," answered George, who wanted to make the worst of it.

"I thought the neck was broken and all was over," returned Leopold, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"Yes, that's how it ought to be; but it fails so often!"

"At least there's no more hanging in public, and that's a comfort," said Leopold.

"What a queer thing," said George to himself, "that a man should be ready to hang for an idea! Why should he not do his best to enjoy what is left of the sunlight, seeing, as their own prophets say, the night cometh when no man can work? A few more whiffs of his cigar before it goes out would hurt no one. It is one thing to hang a murderer, and quite another to hang yourself if you happen to be the man. But he's stark, raving mad, and must be humoured. Dance upon nothing for an idea! Well, it's not without plenty of parallels in history! I wonder whether his one idea would give way now if it were brought to the actual test of hanging. It is a pity it couldn't be tried, just for experiment's sake. But a strait-waistcoat would be better."

Leopold's acquaintance with George had been but small, and of his favourite theories he knew nothing. But he had always known that he was not merely his sister's cousin, but the trusted friend both of her and of her aunt; and since he had come to know of his frequent visits, he had begun to believe him more to Helen than a friend. Hence the moment he had made up his mind to confess, he was ready to trust George entirely: and although he was disappointed to find him receive his communication in a spirit so different from that of Wingfold and his friend, he felt no motion of distrust on that account, seeing Helen, who had been to him true as steel, took the same view of his resolution.

"What would you do yourself then, George, if you had committed a crime like mine?" he asked, after lying silent for a while.

None of George's theories had greatly taxed his imagination. He had not been in any habit of fancying himself in this or that situation—and when he did, it was always in some pleasant one of victory or recognition. Possible conditions of humanity other than pleasant he had been content to regard from the outside and come to logical conclusions concerning, without, as a German would say, thinking

himself into them at all; and it would have been to do the very idea of George Bascombe a wrong to imagine him entangled in any such net of glowing wire as a crime against human society! Therefore, although for most questions George had always an answer ready, for this he had none at hand, and required a moment, and but a moment, to think.

"I would say to myself," he replied, "'What is done is done, and is beyond my power to alter or help.' And so I would be a man, and bear it—not a weakling, and let it crush me. No, by Jove! it shouldn't crush *me!*"

"Ah! but you haven't tried the weight of it, George!" returned Leopold.

"God forbid!" said George.

"God forbid! indeed," rejoined Leopold; "but there 'tis done for all his forbidding!"

"What's done is done, God or devil, and must be borne, I say," said Bascombe, stretching out his legs. He was aware it sounded heartless, but how could he help it? What else was there to be said?

"But if you can't bear it? If it is driving you mad—mad—mad! If you must do something or kill yourself?" cried Leopold.

"You haven't done your best at trying yet," returned George. "But you are ill, and not very able to try, I dare say, and so we can't help it. On Monday we shall go to Mr. Hooker, and see what he says to it."

He rose and went to get a book from the library. On the stair he met the butler: Mr Wingfold had called to see Mr. Lingard.

"He can't see him to-day; he is too much exhausted," said Bascombe; and the curate left the house thoughtful and sorry, feeling as if a vulture had settled by the side of the youth—a good-natured vulture, no doubt, but not the less one bent on picking out the eyes of his mind.

He walked away along the street towards the church with downbent head, seeing no one. He entered the churchyard not looking whither he went: a lovely soul was in pain and

peril, and he could not get near to help it. They were giving it choke-damp to breathe, instead of mountain air. They were washing its sores with anodynes instead of laying them open with the knife of honesty, that they might be cleansed and healed. He found himself stumbling among the level gravestones and stopped and sat down.

He sat a while, seeming to think of nothing, his eyes resting on a little tuft of moss that shone like green gold in the sunlight on the shoulder of an awkward little cherub's wing. Ere long he found himself thinking how not the soul of Leopold but that of Helen was in chief danger. Poor Leopold had the serpent of his crime to sting him alive, but Helen had the vampire of an imperfect love to fan her asleep with the airs of a false devotion. It was Helen he had to be anxious about more than Leopold.

He rose and walked back to the house.

"Can I see Miss Lingard?" he asked.

It was a maid who opened the door this time. She showed him into the library, and went to inquire.

CHAPTER LXV.

WINGFOLD AND HELEN.

WHEN Helen lay down, she tried to sleep; but she could not even lie still. For all her preference of George and his counsel, and her hope in the view he took of Leopold's case, the mere knowledge that in the next room her cousin sat by her brother made her anxious and restless.

At first it was the bare feeling that they were together—the thing she had for so long taken such pains to prevent. Next came the fear lest Leopold should succeed in persuading George that he was really guilty—in which case what should George, the righteous man, counsel? And, last and chief of all, what hope of peace to Leopold could he in any of his counsel—except, indeed, he led him up to the door of death and urged him into the nothingness behind it? Then what if George should be wrong, and there *was* something behind it? Whatever sort of a something it might be, could the teaching of George be in the smallest measure a preparation for it? Were it not better, so far as the *possibility* which remained untouched by any of George's arguments was concerned, that Leopold should die believing after Mr. Wingfold's fashion, and not disbelieving after George's? If then there were nothing behind, he would be nothing the worse; if there were, the curate might have in some sort prepared him for it.

And now first she began to feel that she was a little afraid of her cousin—that she had yielded to his influence, or rather allowed him to assume upon the possession of influence, until she was aware of something that somewhere galled. He was a very good fellow, but was he one fit to rule her life? Would her nature consent to look up to his always, if she were to marry him? But the thought only flitted like a cloud across the surface of her mind, for all her care was Leopold, and, alas! with him she was now almost angry, and it grieved her sorely.

All these feelings together had combined to form her mood, when her maid came to the door with the message that Mr. Wingfold was in the library. She resolved at once to see him.

The curate's heart trembled a little as he waited for her. He was not quite sure that it was his business to tell her her duty, yet something seemed to drive him to it: he could not bear the idea of her going on in the path of crookedness. It is no easy matter for one man to tell another his duty in the simplest relations of life; and here was a man, naturally shy and self-distrustful, daring to rebuke and instruct a woman whose presence was mighty upon him, and whose influence was tenfold heightened by the suffering that softened her beauty!

She entered, troubled, yet stately; doubtful, yet with a kind of half-trust in her demeanour; white and blue-eyed, with pained mouth and a droop of weariness and suffering in eye-lids and neck—a creature to be worshipped, if only for compassion and dignified distress.

Thomas Wingfold's nature was one more than usually bent towards helpfulness, but his early history, his lack of friends, of confidence, of convictions, of stand or aim in life, had hitherto prevented the outcome of that tendency. But now, like issuing water, which, having found way, gathers force momently, the pent-up ministration of his soul was asserting itself. Now that he understood more of the human heart, and recognised in this and that human countenance the bars of a cage through which peeped an imprisoned life, his own

heart burned in him with the love of the helpless ; and if there was mingled therein anything of the ambition of benefaction, anything of the love of power, anything of self-recommendation, pride of influence, or desire to be a centre of good, and rule in a small kingdom of the aided and aiding, these marshy growths had the fairest chance of dying an obscure death ; for the one sun potent on the wheat for life and on the tares for death is the face of Christ Jesus, and in that presence Wingfold lived more and more from day to day.

And now came Helen, who, more than any one whose history he had yet learned—more perhaps than even her brother—needed such help as he confidently hoped he knew now where she might find! But when he saw her stand before him wounded and tearful and proud, regarding his behaviour in respect of her brother as cruel and heartless ; when he felt in his very soul that she was jealous of his influence, that she disliked and even despised him, it was only with a strong effort he avoided assuming a manner correspondent to the idea of himself he saw reflected in her mind, and submitting himself, as it were, to be what she judged him.

When, however, by a pure effort of will, he rose above this weakness and looked her full and clear in the face, a new jealousy of himself arose ; she stood there so lovely, so attractive, so tenfold womanly in her misery, that he found he must keep a stern watch upon himself lest interest in her as a woman should trespass on the sphere of simple humanity, wherein with favouring distinction is recognised neither Jew nor Greek, prince nor peasant—not even man or woman ; only the one human heart that can love and suffer. It aided him in this respect, however, that his inherent modesty caused him to look up to Helen as to a suffering goddess, noble, grand, lovely, only ignorant of the one secret of which he, haunting the steps of the Unbound Prometheus, had learned a few syllables, broken yet potent, which he would fain, could he find how, communicate in their potency to her. And besides, to help her now looking upon him from the distant height of conscious superiority, he must persuade her

to what she regarded as an unendurable degradation! The circumstances assuredly protected him from any danger of offering her such expression of sympathy as might not have been welcome to her.

It is true that the best help a woman can get is from a right man; equally true with its converse; but let the man who ventures take heed. Unless he is able to counsel a woman to the hardest thing that bears the name of duty, let him not dare give advice even to her asking.

Helen, however, had not come to ask advice of Wingfold. She was in no such mood. She was indeed weary of a losing strife, and, only for a glimmer of possible help from her cousin, saw ruin inevitable before her. But this revival of hope in George had roused afresh her indignation at the intrusion of Wingfold with what she chose to lay to his charge as unsought counsel. At the same time, through all the indignation, terror, and dismay, something within her murmured audibly enough that the curate, and not her cousin, was the guide who could lead her brother where grew the herb of what peace might yet be had. It was therefore with a sense of bewilderment, discord, and uncertainty that she now entered the library.

Wingfold rose, made his obeisance, and advanced a step or two. He would not offer a hand that might be unwelcome, and Helen did not offer hers. She bent her neck graciously, and motioned him to be seated.

"I hope Mr. Lingard is not worse," he said.

Helen started. Had anything happened while she had been away from him?

"No. Why should he be worse?" she answered. "Have they told you anything?"

"I have heard nothing; only, as I was not allowed to see him—"

"I left him with Mr. Bascombe half an hour ago," she said, willing to escape the imputation of having refused him admittance.

Wingfold gave an involuntary sigh.

"You do not think that gentleman's company desirable

for my brother, I presume," she said, with a smile so lustreless that it seemed bitter.

"He won't do him any harm—at least I do not think you need fear it."

"Why not? No one in your profession can think his opinions harmless, and certainly he will not suppress them."

"A man with such a weight on his soul as your brother carries will not be ready to fancy it lightened by having lumps of lead thrown upon it. An easy mind may take a shroud on its shoulders for wings, but when trouble comes and it wants to fly, then it knows the difference. Leopold will not be misled by Mr. Bascombe."

Helen grew paler. She would have him misled—so far as not to betray himself.

"I am far more afraid of your influence than of his," added the curate.

"What bad influence do you suppose me likely to exercise?" asked Helen, with a cold smile.

"The bad influence of wishing him to act upon your conscience instead of his own."

"Is my conscience then a worse one than Leopold's?" she asked, but as if she felt no interest in the answer.

"It is not his, and that is enough. His own, and no other, can tell him what to do."

"Why not leave him to it, then?" she said bitterly.

"That is what I want of you, Miss Lingard. I would have you fear to touch the life of the poor youth."

"Touch his life! I would give him mine to save it. *You* counsel him to throw it away!"

"Alas! what different meanings we put on the word. You call the few years he may have to live in this world his life; while I—"

"While you count it the millions of which you know nothing—somewhere whence no one has ever returned to bring any news!—a wretched life at best, if it be such as you represent it."

"Pardon me, that is merely what you suppose I mean by the word. I do not mean that; I mean something altogether

different. When I spoke of his life, I thought nothing about here or there, now or then. You will see what I mean if you think how the life came back to his eye and the colour to his cheek the moment he had made up his mind to do what had long seemed his duty. When I saw him again, that light was still in his eyes and a feeble hope looked out of every feature. Existence, from a demon-haunted vapour, had begun to change to a morning of spring: life, the life of conscious well-being, of law and order and peace, had begun to dawn in obedience and self-renunciation; his resurrection was at hand. But you then, and now you and Mr. Bascombe, would stop this resurrection; you would seat yourselves upon his gravestone to keep him down! And why? Lest he, lest you, lest your family should be disgraced by letting him out of his grave to tell the truth."

"Sir!" cried Helen indignantly, drawing herself to her full height and something more.

Wingfold took one step nearer to her. "My calling is to speak the truth," he said; "and I am bound to warn you that you will never be at peace in your own soul until you love your brother aright."

"Love my brother!" Helen almost screamed. "I would die for him."

"Then at least let your pride die for him," said Wingfold, not without indignation.

Helen left the room, and Wingfold the house.

She had hardly shut the door and fallen again upon the bed, when she began to know in her heart that the curate was right. But the more she knew it, the less would she confess it even to herself: it was unendurable.

CHAPTER LXVI.

A REVIEW.

THE curate walked hurriedly home and seated himself at his table, where yet lay his Greek Testament open at the passage he had been pondering for his sermon. Alas! all he had then been thinking with such fervour had vanished. He knew his inspiring text, but the rest was gone. Worst of all, feeling was gone with thought, and was, for the time at least, beyond recall. Righteous as his anger was, it had ruffled the mirror of his soul till it could no longer reflect heavenly things. He rose, caught up his New Testament, and went to the churchyard. It was a still place, and since the pains of the new birth had come upon him, he had often sought the shelter of its calm. A few yards from the wall of the rectory-garden stood an old yew-tree, and a little nearer on one side was a small thicket of cypress: between these and the wall was an ancient stone upon which he generally seated himself. It already had begun to be called the curate's chair. Most imagined him drawn thither by a clerical love of gloom, but in that case he could scarcely have had much delight in seeing the sky through the dark foliage of the yew: he thought the part so seen looked more divinely blue than any of the rest. He would have admitted, however, that he found quiet for the soul as well as the body upon this edge of the world, this brink of the gulf that

swallowed the ever-pouring, ever-vanishing Niagara of human life. On the stone he now seated himself, and fell a-musing.

What a change had come upon him—slow indeed, yet how vast—since the night when he sat in the same churchyard indignant and uneasy, with the words of Bascombe like hot coals in his heart! He had been made ashamed of himself who had never thought much of himself, but the more he had lost of worthiness in his own eyes, the more he had gained in worth; and the more his poor satisfaction with himself had died out, the more the world had awaked around him. For it must be remembered that a little conceit is no more to be endured than a great one, but must be swept utterly away. Sky and wind and water and birds and trees said to him, "Forget thyself, and we will think of thee. Sing no more to thyself thy foolish songs of decay, and we will all sing to thee of love and hope and faith and resurrection." Earth and air had grown full of hints and sparkles and vital motions, as if between them and his soul an abiding community of fundamental existence had manifested itself. He had never, in the old days that were so near and yet seemed so far behind him, consciously cared for the sunlight: now even the shadows were marvellous in his eyes, and the glitter of the golden weather-cock on the tower was like a cry of the prophet Isaiah. High and alone in the clear blue air it swung, an endless warning to him that veers with the wind of the world, the words of men, the summer breezes of their praise, or the bitter blasts of their wintry blame; it was no longer to him a cock of the winds, but a cock of the truth—a Peter-cock, that crew aloud in golden shine its rebuke of cowardice and lying. Never before had he sought acquaintance with the flowers that came dreaming up out of the earth in the woods and the lanes like a mist of loveliness, but the spring-time came in his own soul, and then he knew the children of the spring. And as the joy of the reviving world found its way into the throats of the birds, so did the spring in his reviving soul find its way into the channels of thought and speech, and

issue in utterance both rhythmic and melodious. But not in any, neither in all of these things lay the chief sign and embodiment of the change he recognised in itself. It was this: that whereas in former times the name Christ had been to him little more than a dull theological symbol, the thought of him and of his thoughts was now constantly with him; ever and anon some fresh light would break from the cloudy halo that enwrapped his grandeur; ever was he growing more the Son of Man to his loving heart, ever more the Son of God to his aspiring spirit. Testimony had merged almost in vision: he saw into, and partly understood, the perfection it presented: he looked upon the face of God and lived. Oftener and oftener, as the days passed, did it seem as if the man were by his side, and at times, in the stillness of the summer eve, when he walked alone, it seemed almost, as thoughts of revealing arose in his heart, that the Master himself was teaching him in spoken words. What need now to rack his soul in following the dim-seen, ever-vanishing paths of metaphysics? He had but to obey the prophet of life, the man whose being and doing and teaching were blended in one three-fold harmony —or, rather, were the three-fold analysis of one white essence—he had but to obey him, haunt his footsteps, and hearken after the sound of his spirit, and all truth would in healthy process be unfolded in himself. What philosophy could carry him where Jesus would carry his obedient friends—into his own peace, namely, far above all fear and all hate, where his soul should breathe such a high atmosphere of strength at once and repose, that he should love even his enemies, and that with no such love as condescendingly overlooks, but with the real, hearty, and self-involved affection that would die to give them the true life! Alas! how far was he from such perfection now—from such a martyrdom, lovely as endless, in the consuming fire of God! And at the thought, he fell from the heights of his contemplation—but was caught in the thicket of prayer.

By the time he reached his lodging, the glow had vanished, but the mood remained. He sat down and wrote

the first sketch of the following verses, then found that his sermon had again drawn nigh and was within the reach of his spiritual tentacles.

Father, I cry to thee for bread,
  With hungered longing, eager prayer ;
Thou hear'st, and givest me instead
  More hunger and a half despair.

O Lord ! how long ? My days decline,
  My youth is lapped in memories old,
I need not bread alone, but wine—
  See, cup and hand to thee I hold.

And yet thou givest : thanks, O Lord !
  That still my heart with hunger faints !
The day will come when at thy board
  I sit forgetting all my plaints.

If rain must come and winds must blow,
  And I pore long o'er dim-seen chart,
Yet, Lord, let not the hunger go,
  And keep the faintness at my heart.

CHAPTER LXVII.

A SERMON TO LEOPOLD.

WHEN the curate stood up to read, his eyes as of themselves sought Mrs. Ramshorn's pew. There sat Helen, with a look that revealed, he thought, more of determination and less of suffering. Her aunt was by her side, cold and glaring, an ecclesiastical puss, ready to spring upon any small church-mouse that dared squeak in its own murine way. Bascombe was not visible, and that was a relief. For an unbelieving face, whether the dull, dining countenance of a mayor, or the keen, searching countenance of a barrister, is a sad bone in the throat of utterance, and has to be of set will passed over, and, if that may be, forgotten. Wingfold tried hard to forget Mrs. Ramshorn's, and one or two besides, and by the time he came to the sermon, thought of nothing but human hearts, their agonies, and Him who came to call them to him.

"*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*"

"Was it then of the sinners first our Lord thought ere he came from the bosom of the Father? Did the perfect will embrace, in the all-atoning tenderness of the divine heart, the degraded, disfigured, defiled, distorted thing, whose angel is too blind ever to see the face of its Father? Through all the hideous filth of the charnel-house which the passions had heaped upon her, did the Word recognise the bound, wing-

lamed, feather-draggled Psyche, panting in horriblest torture? Did he have a desire to the work of his hands, the child of his father's heart, and therefore, strong in compassion, speed to the painful rescue of hearts like his own? That purity and defilement should thus meet across all the great dividing gulf of law and morals! The friend of publicans and sinners! Think: he was absolutely friendly with them! was not shocked at them! held up no hands of dismay! Only they must do so no more.

"If he were to come again visibly, now, which do you think would come crowding around him in greater numbers —the respectable church-goers or the people from the slums? I do not know. I dare not judge. But the fact that the church draws so few of those that are despised, of those whom Jesus drew and to whom most expressly he came, gives ground for question as to how far the church is like her Lord. Certainly many a one would find the way to the feet of the Master from whom the respectable church-goer, the Pharisee of our time, and the priest who stands on his profession, would draw back with disgust. And doubtless it would be in the religious world that a man like Jesus, who, without a professional education, a craftsman by birth and early training, uttered scarce a phrase endorsed by clerical use, or a word of the religious cant of the day, but taught in simplest natural forms the eternal facts of faith and hope and love, would meet with the chief and perhaps the only *bitter* opponents of his doctrine and life.

"But did our Lord not call the righteous? Did he not call honest men about him—James and John and Simon,—sturdy fisher-folk, who faced the night and the storm, worked hard, fared roughly, lived honestly, and led good, cleanly lives with father and mother or with wife and children? I do not know that he said anything special to convince them that they were sinners before he called them. But it is to be remarked that one of the first effects of his company upon Simon Peter was that the fisherman grew ashamed of himself, and while ashamed was yet possessed with an impulse of

openness and honesty no less than passionate. The pure man should not be deceived as to what sort of company he was in! 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' I would I could clearly behold with my mind's eye what he then saw in Jesus that drew from him that cry! He knew him for the Messiah: what was the working of the carpenter upon the fisherman that satisfied him of the fact? Would the miracle have done it but for the previous talk from the boat to the people? I think not. Anyhow St. Peter judged himself among the sinners, and we may be sure that if these fishers had been self-satisfied men, they would not have left all and gone after Him who called them. Still it would hardly seem that it was specially as sinners that he did so. Again, did not men such as the Lord himself regarded as righteous come to him—Nicodemus, Nathaniel, the young man who came running and kneeled to him, the scribe who was not far from the kingdom, the centurion, in whom he found more faith than in any Jew, he who had built a synagogue in Capernaum, and sculptured on its lintel the pot of manna? These came to him, and we know he was ready to receive them. But he knew such would always come, drawn of the Father; they did not want much calling; they were not so much in his thoughts, therefore; he was not troubled about them; they were as the ninety-and-nine, the elder son at home, the money in the purse. Doubtless they had much to learn, were not yet in the kingdom, but they were crowding about its door. If I set it forth aright I know not, but thus it looks to me. And one thing I cannot forget —it meets me in the face—that some at least—who knows if not all?—of the purest of men have counted themselves the greatest sinners! Neither can I forget that other saying of our Lord, a stumbling-block to many—our Lord was not so careful as perhaps some would have had him, lest men should stumble at the truth—*The first shall be last and the last first.* While our Lord spoke the words, *The time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service*, even then was Saul of Tarsus at the feet of Gamaliel, preparing to do God that service; but like one born out of due time, after

all the rest he saw the Lord, and became the chief in labour and suffering. Thus the last became first. And I bethink me that the beloved disciple, he who leaned on the bosom of the Lord, who was bolder to ask him than any—with the boldness of love, he whom the meek and lowly called a Son of Thunder, was the last of all to rejoin the Master in the mansions of his Father. Last or first—if only we are with him! One thing is clear: that in the order of the Lord's business, first came sinners.

"Who that reflects can fail to see this at least: that a crime brings a man face to face with the reality of things? He who knows himself a sinner—I do not mean as one of the race: the most self-righteous man will allow that as a man he is a sinner—he to whom, in the words of the communion-service, the remembrance of his sins is grievous, and the burden of them intolerable, knows in himself that he is a lost man. He can no more hold up his head among his kind; he cannot look a woman or a child in the face; he cannot be left alone with the chaos of his thoughts and the monsters it momently breeds. The joys of his childhood, the delights of existence, are gone from him. There dwells within him an ever-present judgment and fiery indignation. Such a man will start at the sound of pardon and peace even as the camel of the desert at the scent of water. Therefore surely is such a man nearer to the gate of the kingdom than he against whom the world has never wagged a tongue, who never sinned against a social custom even, and has as easy a conscience as the day he was born, but who knows so little of himself that, while he thinks he is good enough, he carries within him the capacity and possibility of every cardinal sin, waiting only the special and fitting temptation which, like the match to the charged mine, shall set all in a roar! Of his danger he knows nothing, never dreams of praying against it, takes his seat in his pew Sunday after Sunday with his family, nor ever murmurs *Lead us not into temptation* with the least sense that temptation is a frightful thing, but repeats and responds and listens in perfect self-satisfaction, doubting never that a

world made up of such as he must be a pleasant sight in the eyes of the Perfect. There are men who will never see what they are capable or in danger of until they have committed some fearful wrong. Nay, there are some for whom even that is not enough : they must be found out by their fellow-men and scorned in the eyes of the world, before they can or will admit or comprehend their own disgrace. And there are worse still than these.

"But a man may be oppressed by his sins, and hardly know what it is that oppresses him. There is more of sin in our burdens than we are ourselves aware. It needs not that we should have committed any grievous fault. Do we recognise in ourselves that which needs to be set right, that of which we ought to be ashamed, something which, were we lifted above all worldly anxieties, would yet keep us uneasy, dissatisfied, take the essential gladness out of the sunlight, make the fair face of the earth indifferent to us, a trustful glance a discomposing look, and death a darkness? I say to the man who feels thus, whatever he may have done or left undone, he is not so far from the kingdom of heaven but that he may enter thereinto if he will.

"And if there be here any soul withered up with dismay, torn with horrible wonder that he should have done the deed which he yet hath done, to him I say, 'Flee from the self that hath sinned and hide thee with Christ in God.' Or, if the words sound to thee as the words of some unknown tongue, and I am to thee as one that beateth the air, I say instead, Call aloud in thy agony, that, if there be a God, he may hear the voice of his child and put forth his hand and lay hold upon him, and rend from him the garment that clings and poisons and burns, squeeze the black drop from his heart, and set him weeping like a summer rain. O blessed, holy, lovely repentance to which the Son of Man, the very root and man of men, hath come to call us! Good it is, and I know it. Come and repent with me, O heart wounded by thine own injustice and wrong, and together we will seek the merciful! Think not about thy sin so as to make it either less or greater in thine own eyes. Bring it to

Jesus, and let him show thee how vile a thing it is. And leave it to him to judge thee, sure that he will judge thee justly, extenuating nothing; for he hath to cleanse thee utterly, and yet forgetting no smallest excuse that may cover the amazement of thy guilt, or witness for thee that not with open eyes didst thou do the deed. At the last he cried, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* For his enemies the truth should be spoken, his first words when they had nailed him to the cross. But again I say, Let it be Christ that excuseth thee; he will do it to more purpose than thou, and will not wrong thy soul by excusing thee a hair too much, or thy heart by excusing thee a hair too little.

"I dreamed once that I had committed a terrible crime. Carried beyond myself by passion, I knew not at the moment *how* evil was the thing I did. But I knew it was evil. And suddenly I became aware, when it was too late, of the nature of that which I had done. The horror that came with the knowledge was of the things that belong only to the secret soul. I was the same man as before I did it, yet was I now a man of whom my former self could not have conceived the possibility as dwelling within it. That former self seemed now by contrast lovely in purity, yet out of that seeming purity this fearful foul *I* of the present had just been born! The face of my fellow-man was an avenging law, the face of a just enemy. Where, how, should the frightful fact be hidden? The conscious earth must take it into its wounded bosom, and that before the all-seeing daylight should come. But it would come, and I should stand therein pointed at by every ray that shot through the sunny atmosphere!

"The agony was of its own kind, and I have no word to tell what it was like. An evil odour and a sickening pain combined might be a symbol of the torture. As is in the nature of dreams, possibly I lay but a little second on the rack, yet an age seemed shot through and through with the burning meshes of that crime, while, cowering and terror-stricken, I tossed about the loathsome fact in my mind. I had *done* it, and from the done there was no escape: it was

for evermore a thing done. . . . Came a sudden change : I awoke. The sun stained with glory the curtains of my room, and the light of life darted keen as an arrow into my very soul. Glory to God ! I was innocent ! The stone was rolled from my sepulchre. With the darkness whence it had sprung, the cloud of my crime went heaving lurid away. I was a creature of the light and not of the dark. For me the sun shone and the wind blew ; for me the sea roared and the flowers sent up their odours. For me the earth had nothing to hide. My guilt was wiped away ; there was no red worm gnawing at my heart ; I could look my neighbour in the face, and the child of my friend might lay his hand in mine and not be defiled ! All day long the joy of that deliverance kept surging on in my soul.

" But something yet more precious, more lovely than such an awaking, will repentance be to the sinner ; for after all it was but a dream of the night from which that set me free, and the spectre-deed that vanished had never had a place in the world of fact ; while the horror from which repentance delivers is no dream, but a stubborn abiding reality. Again, the vanishing vision leaves the man what he was before, still capable, it may be, of committing the crime from which he is not altogether clean, to whom in his sleep it was possible : repentance makes of the man a new creature, one who has awaked from the sleep of sin to sleep that sleep no more. The change in the one case is not for greatness comparable with that in the other. The sun that awakes from the one sleep is but the outward sun of our earthly life—a glorious, indeed, and lovely thing, which yet even now is gathering a crust of darkness, blotting itself out and vanishing. The sun that awakes a man from the sleep of death is the living Sun that casts from his thought out into being that other sun, with the space wherein it holds its planetary court—the Father of lights, before whose shining in the inner world of truth eternal even the deeds of vice become as spectral dreams, and, with the night of godlessness that engendered them, flee away.

" But a man may answer and say to me, ' Thou art but

borne on the wings of thine imagination. The fact of the crime remains, let a man tear out his heart in repentance; and no awaking can restore an innocence which is indeed lost.' I answer: The words thou speakest are in themselves true, yet thy ignorance makes them false. Thou knowest not the power of God, nor what resurrection from the dead means. What if, while it restored not thy former innocence, it brought thee a purity by the side of whose white splendour and inward preciousness the innocence thou hadst lost was but a bauble, being but a thing that turned to dross in the first furnace of its temptation? Innocence is indeed priceless—that innocence which God counteth innocence—but thine was a flimsy show, a bit of polished and cherished glass, instead of which, if thou repentest, thou shalt in thy jewel-box find a diamond. Is thy purity, O fair Psyche of the social world, upon whose wings no spattering shower has yet cast an earthy stain, and who knowest not yet whether there be any such thing as repentance or need of the same! —is thy purity to compare with the purity of that heavenly Psyche, twice born, who even now in the twilight slumbers of heaven dreams that she washes with her tears the feet of her Lord, and wipes them with the hairs of her head? O bountiful God, who wilt give us back even our innocence ten-fold! He can give an awaking that leaves the past of the soul ten times farther behind than ever waking from sleep left the dreams of the night.

"If the potency of that awaking lay in the inrush of a new billow of life fresh from its original source, carrying with it an enlargement of the whole nature and its every part, a glorification of every faculty, every sense even, so that the man, forgetting nothing of his past or its shame, should yet cry out in the joy of his second birth, 'Lo! I am a new man; I am no more he who did that awful and evil thing, for I am no more capable of doing it! God be praised, for all is well!'—would not such an awaking send the past afar into the dim distance of the first creation, and wrap the ill deed in the clean linen cloth of forgiveness, even as the dull creature of the sea rolls up the grain of intruding sand in the lovely

garment of a pearl? Such an awaking means God himself in the soul, not disdaining closest vital company with the creature he foresaw and created. And the man knows in full content that he is healed of his plague. Nor would he willingly lose the scars which record its outbreak, for they tell him what he is without God, and set him ever looking to see that the door into the heavenly garden stands wide for God to enter the house when it pleases him. And who can tell whether in the train of such an awaking may not follow a thousand opportunities and means of making amends to those whom he has injured?

"Nor must I fail to remind the man who has committed no grievous crime, that except he has repented of his evil self and abjured all wrong, he is not safe from any even the worst offence. There was a time when I could not understand that he who loved not his brother was a murderer: now I see it to to be no figure of speech, but, in the realities of man's moral and spiritual nature, an absolute simple fact. The murderer and the unloving sit on the same bench before the judge of eternal truth. The man who loves not his brother I do not say is at this moment capable of killing him, but if the natural working of his unlove be not checked, he will assuredly become capable of killing him. Until we love our brother—yes, until we love our enemy, who is yet our brother—we contain within ourselves the undeveloped germ of murder. And so with every sin in the tables or out of the tables. There is not one in this congregation who has a right to cast a look of reproach at the worst felon who ever sat in the prisoner's dock. I speak no hyperbole, but simple truth. We are very ready to draw in our minds a distinction between respectable sins—human imperfections we call them, perhaps—and disreputable vices, such as theft and murder; but there is no such distinction in fact. Many a thief is a better man than many a clergyman, and miles nearer to the gate of the kingdom. The heavenly order goes upon other principles than ours, and there are first that shall be last, and last that shall be first. Only, at the root of all human bliss lies repentance.

"Come then at the call of the Waker, the Healer, the Giver of repentance and light, the Friend of publicans and sinners, all ye on whom lies the weight of a sin or the gathered heap of a thousand crimes! He came to call such as you that he might make you clear and clean. He cannot bear that you should live on in such misery, such badness, such blackness of darkness. He would give you again your life, the bliss of your being. He will not speak to you one word of reproach, except, indeed, you should aim at justifying yourselves by accusing your neighbour. He will leave it to those who cherish the same sins in their hearts to cast stones at you: he who has no sin casts no stone. Heartily he loves you, heartily he hates the evil in you—so heartily that he will even cast you into the fire to burn you clean. By making you clean he will give you rest. If he upbraid, it will not be for past sin, but for the present little faith, holding out to him an acorn-cup to fill. The rest of you, keep aloof if you will, until you shall have done some deed that compels you to cry out for deliverance; but you that know yourselves sinners, come to him that he may work in you his perfect work, for he came not to call the righteous, but sinners—us, you and me—to repentance."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

AFTER THE SERMON.

AS the sermon drew to a close, and the mist of his emotion began to disperse, individual faces of his audience again dawned out on the preacher's ken. Mr. Drew's head was down. As I have already said, certain things he had been taught in his youth and had practised in his manhood, certain mean ways counted honest enough in the trade, had become to him, regarded from the ideal point of the divine in merchandise—such a merchandise, namely, as the share the Son of Man might have taken in buying and selling, had his reputed father been a shopkeeper instead of a carpenter —absolutely hateful, and the memory of them intolerable. Nor did it relieve him much to remind himself of the fact that he knew not to the full the nature of the advantages he took, for he knew that he had known them such as shrank from the light, not coming thereto to be made manifest. He was now doing his best to banish them from his business, and yet they were a painful presence to his spirit—so grievous to be borne that the prospect held out by the preacher of an absolute and final deliverance from them, by the indwelling presence of the God of all living men and true merchants, was a blessedness unspeakable. Small was the suspicion in the Abbey Church of Glaston, that morning, that the well-known successful man of business was weeping. Who could

once have imagined another reason for the laying of that round, good-humoured, contented face down on the book-board than pure drowsiness from lack of work-day interest? Yet there was a human soul crying out after its birthright. Oh! to be clean as a mountain river! clean as the air above the clouds or on the middle seas! as the throbbing æther that fills the gulf betwixt star and star!—nay, as the thought of the Son of Man himself, who, to make all things new and clean, stood up against the whole battery of sin-sprung suffering, withstanding and enduring and stilling the recoil of the awful force wherewith his Father had launched the worlds, and given birth to human souls with wills that might become free as his own.

While Wingfold had been speaking in general terms, with the race in his mind's and the congregation in his body's eye, he had yet thought more of one soul, with its one crime and its intolerable burden, than of all the rest: Leopold was ever present to him, and while he strove to avoid absorption in a personal interest however justifiable, it was of necessity that the thought of the most burdened sinner he knew should colour the whole of his utterance. At times, indeed, he felt as if he were speaking to him immediately, and to him only; at others, although then he saw her no more than him, that he was comforting the sister individually, in holding out to her brother the mighty hope of a restored purity. And when once more his mind could receive the messages brought home by his eyes, he saw upon Helen's face the red sunset of a rapt listening. True, it was already fading away, but the eyes had wept, the glow yet hung about cheek and forehead, and the firm mouth had forgotten itself into a tremulous form, which the stillness of absorption had there for the moment fixed.

But even already, although he could not yet read it upon her countenance, a snake had begun to lift its head from the chaotic swamp which runs a creek at least into every soul, the rudimentary desolation, a remnant of the time when the world was without form and void. And the snake said, "Why then did he not speak like that to my Leopold?

Why did he not comfort him with such a good hope, well becoming a priest of the gentle Jesus? Or, if he fancied he must speak of confession, why did he not speak of it in plain honest terms, instead of suggesting the idea of it so that the poor boy imagined it came from his own spirit, and must therefore be obeyed as the will of God?"

So said the snake; and by the time Helen had walked home with her aunt, the glow had sunk from her soul, and a gray, wintry mist had settled down upon her spirit. And she said to herself that if this last hope in George should fail her, she would not allow the matter to trouble her any further; she was a free woman, and, as Leopold had chosen other counsellors, had thus declared her unworthy of confidence, and, after all that she had suffered and done for love of him, had turned away from her, she would put money in her purse, set out for France or Italy, and leave him to the fate, whatever it might be, which his new advisers and his own obstinacy might bring upon him. Was the innocent bound to share the shame of the guilty? Had she not done enough? Would even her father require more of her than she had already done and endured?

When, therefore, she went into Leopold's room, and his eyes sought her from the couch, she took no notice that he had got up and dressed while she was at church; and he knew that a cloud had come between them, and that after all she had borne and done for him, he and his sister were now farther apart, for the time at least, than when oceans lay betwixt their birth and their meeting; and he found himself looking back with vague longing even to the terrible old house of Glaston, and the sharing of their agony therein. His eyes followed her as she walked across to the dressing-room, and the tears rose and filled them, but he said nothing. And the sister who, all the time of the sermon, had been filled with wave upon wave of wishing—that Poldie could hear this, could hear that, could have such a thought to comfort him, such a lovely word to drive the horror from his soul—now cast on him a chilly glance, and said never a word of the things to which she had listened with such

heavings of the spirit-ocean; for she felt, with an instinct more righteous than her will, that they would but strengthen him in his determination to do whatever the teacher of them might approve. As she repassed him to go to the drawing-room, she did indeed say a word of kindness; but it was in a forced tone, and was only about his dinner! His eyes overflowed, but he shut his lip so tight that his mouth grew grim with determination, and no more tears came.

To the friend who joined her at the church-door, and, in George Bascombe's absence, walked with them along Pine Street, Mrs. Ramshorn remarked that the curate was certainly a most dangerous man—particularly for young people to hear—he so confounded all the landmarks of right and wrong, representing the honest man as no better than the thief, and the murderer as no worse than anybody else—teaching people, in fact, that the best thing they could do was to commit some terrible crime, in order thereby to attain to a better innocence than without it could ever be theirs. How far she mistook, or how far she knew or suspected that she spoke falsely, I will not pretend to know. But although she spoke as she did, there was something, either in the curate or in the sermon, that had quieted her a little, and she was less contemptuous in her condemnation of him than usual.

Happily both for himself and others, the curate was not one of those who cripple the truth and blind their own souls by

> some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on the event—
> A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom,
> And ever three parts coward;

and hence, in proportion as he roused the honest, he gave occasion to the dishonest to cavil and condemn. Imagine St. Paul having a prevision of how he would be misunderstood, *and heeding it!*—what would then have become of all those his most magnificent outbursts? And would any amount of apostolic carefulness have protected him? I suspect it would only have given rise to more vulgar mis-

understandings and misrepresentations still. To explain to him who loves not, is but to give him the more plentiful material for misinterpretation. Let a man have truth in the inward parts, and out of the abundance of his heart let his mouth speak. If then he should have ground to fear honest misunderstanding, let him preach again to enforce the truth for which he is jealous, and if it should seem to any that the two utterances need reconciling, let those who would have them consist reconcile them for themselves.

The reason of George Bascombe's absence from church that morning was that, after an early breakfast, he had mounted Helen's mare and set out to call on Mr. Hooker before he should have gone to church. Helen expected him back to dinner, and was anxiously looking for him. So also was Leopold, but the hopes of the two were different.

At length the mare's hoofs echoed through all Sunday Glaston, and presently George rode up. The groom took his horse in the street, and he came into the drawing-room. Helen hastened to meet him.

"Well, George?" she said anxiously.

"Oh! it's all right!—will be at least, I am sure. I will tell you all about it in the garden after dinner. Aunt has the good sense never to interrupt us there," he added. "I'll just run and show myself to Leopold: he must not suspect I am of your party and playing him false. Not that it is false, you know! for two negatives make a positive, and to fool a madman is to give him fair play."

The words jarred sorely on Helen's ear.

Bascombe hurried to Leopold and informed him that he had seen Mr. Hooker, and that all was arranged for taking him over to his place on Tuesday morning, if by that time he should be able for the journey.

"Why not to-morrow?" said Leopold. "I am quite able."

"Oh! I told him you were not very strong. And he wanted a run after the hounds to-morrow. So we judged it better put off till Tuesday."

Leopold gave a sigh, and said no more.

CHAPTER LXIX.

BASCOMBE AND THE MAGISTRATE.

AFTER dinner the cousins went to the summer-house, and there George gave Helen his report, revealing his plan and hope for Leopold.

"Such fancies must be humoured, you know, Helen. There is nothing to be gained by opposing them," he said.

Helen looked at him with keen eyes, and he returned the gaze. The confidence betwixt them was not perfect: each was doubtful as to the thought of the other, and neither asked what it was.

"A fine old cock is Mr. Hooker!" said George; "a jolly, good-natured, brick-faced squire; a Tory, of course, and a sound churchman; as simple as a baby, and took everything I told him without a hint of doubt or objection—just the sort of man I expected to find him! When I mentioned my name, etc., he found he had known my father, and that gave me a good start. Then I lauded his avenue, and apologised for troubling him so early and on Sunday too, but said it was a pure work of mercy in which I begged his assistance—as a magistrate, I added, lest he should fancy I had come after a subscription. It was a very delicate case, I said, in which were concerned the children of a man of whom he had, I believed, at one time known something—General Lingard. 'To be sure!' he cried; 'I knew him very well; a fine

fellow, but hasty, sir—hasty in his temper!' I said I had never known him myself, but one of his children was my cousin; the other was the child of his second wife, a Hindoo lady, unfortunately, and it was about him I presumed to trouble him. Then I plunged into the matter at once, telling him that Leopold had had violent brain-fever, brought on by a horrible drug the use of which, if use I dared call it, he had learned in India; and that, although he had recovered from the fever, it was very doubtful if ever he would recover from the consequences of it, for that he had become the prey of a fixed idea, the hard deposit from a heated imagination. 'And pray what is the idea?' he asked. 'Neither more nor less,' I answered, 'than that he is a murderer!'—'God bless me!' he cried, somewhat to my alarm, for I had been making all this preamble to prejudice the old gentleman in the right direction, lest afterwards Leopold's plausibility might be too much for him. So I echoed the spirit of his exclamation, declaring it was one of the saddest things I had ever known, that a fellow of such sweet and gentle nature, one utterly incapable of unkindness, not to say violence, should be so possessed by misery and remorse for a phantom deed, no more his than if he had but dreamed it, a thing he not only did not do, but never could have done. I had not yet, however, told him, I said, what was perhaps the saddest point in the whole sad story—namely, that the attack had been brought on by the news of the actual murder of a lady to whom he had been passionately attached; the horror of it had unhinged his reason, then turned and fastened upon his imagination; so that he was now convinced, beyond the reach of argument or even the clearest proof, that it was his own hand that drove the knife to her heart. Then I recalled to his memory the case as reported, adding that the fact of the murderer's prolonged evasion of justice appeared, by some curious legerdemain of his excited fancy, if not to have suggested—of that I was doubtful—yet to have ripened his conviction of guilt. Now nothing would serve him but he must give himself up, confess—no, that was not a true word in his case—accuse himself of the crime, and meet his fate

on the gallows, 'in the hope, observe, my dear sir,' I said, 'of finding her in the other world, and there making it up with her!' 'God bless me!' he cried again, in a tone of absolute horror. And every now and then, while I spoke he would ejaculate something; and still as he listened, his eyes grew more and more bloodshot with interest and compassion. 'Ah, I see!' he said then; you want to send him to a mad-house. Don't do it,' he continued, in a tone of expostulation, almost entreaty. 'Poor boy! he may get over it. Let his friends look to him. He has a sister, you say?' I quickly reassured him, telling him such was no one's desire, and saying I would come to the point in a moment, only there was one thing more which had interested me greatly, as revealing how a brain in such a condition will befool itself, all but generating two individualities. There I am afraid I put my foot in it, but he was far too simple to see it was cloven—ha! ha!—and I hastened to remark that, as a magistrate, he must have had numberless opportunities of noting similar phenomena. He waved his hand in deprecation, and I hastened to remark that, up to a certain point, whatever hint the newspapers had given, Leopold had expanded and connected with every other, but that at one part of the story I had found him entirely at fault: he could not tell what he did, where he went, or how he had felt first after the deed was done. He confessed all after that was a blank until he found himself in bed. But when I told him something he had not seen—which his worship might remember—the testimony, namely, of the coast-guardsman—about the fishing-boat with the two men in it—I had here to refresh his memory as to the whole of that circumstance, and did so by handing him the newspaper containing it—that was what I made you give me the paper for. I have lost the thread of my sentence, but never mind. I told him then something I have not told you yet, Helen—namely, that when I happened to allude to that portion of the story, Leopold started up with flashing eyes, and exclaimed, Now I remember! It all comes back to me as clear as day. I remember running down the hill, and jumping into the boat just as they shoved

off. I was exhausted and fell down in the stern. When I came to myself, the two men were forward : I saw their legs through beneath the sails. I thought they would be sure to give me up, and at once I slipped overboard. The water revived me, but when I reached the shore I fell down again, and lay there I don't know how long. Indeed I don't remember anything more except confusedly.' That is what Leopold said, and what I now told Mr. Hooker. Then at last I opened my mind to him as to wherein I ventured to ask his assistance ; and my petition was that he would allow me to bring Leopold, and would let him go through the form of giving himself up to justice. Especially I begged that he would listen to all he had to say, and give no sign that he doubted his story. 'And then, sir,' I concluded, 'I would leave it to you to do what we cannot—reconcile him to going home instead of to prison.'

"He sat with his head on his hand for a while, as if pondering some weighty question of law. Then he said suddenly, 'It is now almost church-time. I will think the matter over. You may rely upon me. Will you take a seat in my pew, and dine with us after?' I excused myself on the ground that I must return at once to poor Leopold, who was anxiously looking for me. And you must forgive me, Helen, and not fancy me misusing Fanny, if I did yield to the temptation of a little longer ride. I have scarcely more than walked her, with a canter now and then when we had the chance of a bit of turf."

Helen assured him with grateful eyes that she knew Fanny was as safe with him as with herself, and she felt such a gush of gratitude follow the revival of hope, that she was nearer being in love with her cousin than ever before. Her gratitude inwardly delighted George, and he thought the light in her blue eyes lovelier than ever ; but although strongly tempted, he judged it better to delay a formal confession until circumstances should be more comfortable.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE CONFESSION.

ALL that and the following day Leopold was in spirits for him wonderful. On Monday night there came a considerable reaction: he was dejected, worn, and weary. Twelve o'clock the next day was the hour appointed for their visit to Mr. Hooker, and at eleven he was dressed and ready —restless, agitated, and very pale, but not a whit less determined than at first. A drive was the pretext for borrowing Mrs. Ramshorn's carriage.

"Why is Mr. Wingfold not coming?" asked Lingard anxiously, when it began to move.

"I fancy we shall be quite as comfortable without him, Poldie," said Helen. "Did you expect him?"

"He promised to go with me. But he hasn't called since the time was fixed." Here Helen looked out of the window. "I can't think why it is. I can do my duty without him, though," continued Leopold, "and perhaps it is just as well. Do you know, George, since I made up my mind I have seen her but once, and that was last night, and only in a dream."

"A state of irresolution is one peculiarly open to unhealthy impressions," said George, good-naturedly disposing of his long legs so that they should be out of the way.

Leopold turned from him to his sister.

"The strange thing, Helen," he said, "was that I did not feel the least afraid of her, or even abashed before her. 'I see you,' I said. 'Be at peace. I am coming; and you shall do to me what you will.' And then—what do you think?—O my God! she smiled one of her own old smiles—only sad, too, very sad—and vanished. I woke, and she seemed only to have just left the room, for there was a stir in the darkness. Do you believe in ghosts, George?"

Leopold was not one of George's initiated, I need hardly say.

"No," answered Bascombe.

"I don't wonder. I can't blame you, for neither did I once. But just wait till you have made one, George!"

"God forbid!" exclaimed Bascombe, a second time forgetting himself.

"Amen!" said Leopold; "for after that there's no help but be one yourself, you know."

"If he would only talk like that to old Hooker!" thought George. "It would go a long way to forestall any possible misconception of the case."

"I can't think why Mr. Wingfold did not come yesterday," resumed Leopold. "I made sure he would."

"Now, Poldie, you mustn't talk," said Helen, "or you'll be exhausted before we get to Mr. Hooker's."

She did not wish the non-appearance of the curate on Monday to be closely inquired into. His company at the magistrate's was by all possible means to be avoided.

George had easily persuaded Helen—more easily than he expected—to wait their return in the carriage, and the two men were shown into the library, where the magistrate presently joined them. He would have shaken hands with Leopold as well as George, but the conscious felon drew back.

"No, sir; excuse me," he said. "Hear what I have to tell you first; and if after that you will shake hands with me, it will be a kindness indeed. But you will not! you will not!"

Worthy Mr. Hooker was overwhelmed with pity at sight of the worn, sallow face with the great eyes, in which he

found every appearance confirmatory of the tale wherewith Bascombe had filled and prejudiced every fibre of his judgment. He listened in the kindest way while the poor boy forced the words of his confession from his throat. But Leopold never dreamed of attributing his emotion to any other cause than compassion for one who had been betrayed into such a crime. It was against his will—for he seemed now bent, even to unreason, on fighting every weakness—that he was prevailed upon to take a little wine. Having ended, he sat silent, in the posture of one whose wrists are already clasped by the double bracelet of steel.

Now Mr. Hooker had thought the thing out in church on Sunday; and after a hard run at the tail of a strong fox over a rough country on the Monday, and a good sleep well into the morning of the Tuesday, could see no better way. His device was simple enough.

"My dear young gentleman," he said, "I am very sorry for you, but I must do my duty."

"That, sir, is what I came to you for," answered Leopold humbly.

"Then you must consider yourself my prisoner. The moment you are gone, I shall make notes of your deposition, and proceed to arrange for the necessary formalities. As a mere matter of form, I shall take your own bail in a thousand pounds to surrender when called upon."

"But I am not of age, and haven't got a thousand pounds," said Leopold.

"Perhaps Mr. Hooker will accept my recognizance in the amount?" said Bascombe.

"Certainly," answered Mr. Hooker, and wrote something which Bascombe signed.

"You are very good, George," said Leopold. "But you know I can't run away if I would," he added, with a pitiful attempt at a smile.

"I hope you will soon be better," said the magistrate kindly.

"Why such a wish, sir?" returned Leopold, almost reproachfully, and the good man stood abashed before him.

He thought of it afterwards, and was puzzled to know how it was.

"You must hold yourself in readiness," he said, recovering himself with an effort, "to give yourself up at any moment. And, remember, I shall call upon you when I please, every week perhaps, or oftener, to see that you are safe. Your aunt is an old friend of mine, and there will be no need of explanations. This turns out to be no common case, and after hearing the whole, I do not hesitate to offer you my hand."

Leopold was overcome by his kindness, and withdrew speechless, but greatly relieved.

Several times during the course of his narrative, its apparent truthfulness and its circumstantiality went nigh to stagger Mr. Hooker; but a glance at Bascombe's face, with its half-amused smile, instantly set him right again, and he thought with dismay how near he had been to letting himself be fooled by a madman.

Again in the carriage, Leopold laid his head on Helen's shoulder, and looked up in her face with such a smile as she had never seen on his before. Certainly there was something in confession—if only enthusiasts like Mr. Wingfold would not spoil all by pushing things to extremes and turning good into bad!

Leopold was yet such a child, had so little occupied himself with things about him, and had been so entirely taken up with his passion and the poetry of existence unlawfully forced, that if his knowledge of the circumstances of Emmeline's murder had depended on the newspapers, he would have remained in utter ignorance concerning them. From the same causes he was so entirely unacquainted with the modes of criminal procedure, that the conduct of the magistrate never struck him as strange, not to say illegal. And so strongly did he feel the good man's kindness and sympathy, that his comfort from making a clean breast of it was even greater than he had expected. Before they reached home he was fast asleep. When laid on his couch, he almost instantly fell asleep again, and Helen saw him smile as he slept.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE MASK.

BUT although such was George Bascombe's judgment of Leopold, and such his conduct of his affair, he could not prevent the recurrent intrusion of the flickering doubt which had shown itself when first he listened to the story. Amid all the wildness of the tale there was yet a certain air not merely of truthfulness in the narrator—that was not to be questioned—but of verisimilitude in the narration, which had its effect, although it gave rise to no conscious exercise of discriminating or ponderating faculty. Leopold's air of conviction also, although of course that might well accompany the merest invention rooted in madness, yet had its force, persistently as George pooh-poohed it—which he did the more strenuously from the intense, even morbid, abhorrence of his nature to being taken in, and having to confess himself of unstable intellectual equilibrium. Possibly this was not the only kind of thing in which the sensitiveness of a vanity he would himself have disowned, had rendered him unfit for perceiving the truth. Nor do I know how much there may be to choose between the two shames—that of accepting what is untrue and that of refusing what is true.

The second time he listened to Leopold's continuous narrative, the doubt returned with more clearness and less

flicker; there was such a thing as being otherwise: might he not be taking himself in with his own incredulity? Ought he not to apply some test? And did Leopold's story offer any means of doing so? One thing, he then found, had been dimly haunting his thoughts ever since he heard it: Leopold affirmed that he had thrown his cloak and mask down an old pitshaft, close by the place of murder. If there was such a shaft, could it be searched? Recurring doubt at length so wrought upon his mind that he resolved to make his holiday excursion to that neighbourhood, and there endeavour to gain what assurance of any sort might be to be had. What end beyond his own possible satisfaction the inquiry was to answer he did not ask himself. The restless spirit of the detective, so often conjoined with indifference to what is in its own nature true, was at work in him; but that was not all: he must know the very facts, if possible, of whatever concerned Helen. I shall not follow his proceedings closely: it is with their reaction upon Leopold that I have to do.

The house where the terrible thing took place was not far from a little moorland village. There Bascombe found a small inn, where he took up his quarters, pretending to be a geologist out for a holiday. He soon came upon the disused shaft.

The inn was a good deal frequented in the evenings by the colliers of the district—a rough race, but not beyond the influences of such an address, mingled of self-assertion and good-fellowship, as Bascombe brought to bear upon them, for he had soon perceived that amongst them he might find the assistance he wanted. In the course of conversation, therefore, he mentioned the shaft, on which he pretended to have come in his rambles. Remarking on the danger of such places, he learned that this one served for ventilation, and was still accessible below from other workings. Thereafter he begged permission to go down one of the pits, on pretext of examining the coal-strata, and having secured for his guide one of the most intelligent of those whose acquaintance he had made at the inn, persuaded him, partly by

expressions of incredulity because of the distance between, to guide him to the bottom of the shaft whose acessibility he maintained. That they were going in the right direction, he had the testimony of a little compass he carried at his watch-chain, and at length he saw a faint gleam before him. When at last he raised his head, wearily bent beneath the low roofs of the passages, and looked upwards, there was a star looking down at him out of the sky of day! But George never wasted time in staring at what was above his head, and so began instantly to search about as if examining the indications of the strata. Was it possible! Could it be? There was a piece of black something that was not coal and seemed textile! It was a half-mask, for there were the eye-holes in it! He caught it up and hurried it into his bag—not so quickly but that the haste set his guide speculating. And Bascombe saw that the action was noted. The man afterwards offered to carry his bag, but he would not allow him.

The next morning he left the place and returned to London, taking Glaston, by a detour, on his way. A few questions to Leopold drew from him a description of the mask he had worn, entirely corresponding with the one George had found; and at length he was satisfied that there was truth more than a little in Leopold's confession. It was not his business, however, he now said to himself, to set magistrates right. True, he had set Mr. Hooker wrong in the first place, but he had done it in good faith, and how could he turn traitor to Helen and her brother? Besides, he was sure the magistrate himself would be anything but obliged to him for opening his eyes! At the same time, Leopold's fanatic eagerness after confession might drive the matter further, and if so, it might become awkward for him. He might be looked to for the defence, and were he not certain that his guide had marked his concealment of what he had picked up, he might have ventured to undertake it, for certainly it would have been a rare chance for a display of the forensic talent he believed himself to possess; but as it was, the moment he was called to the bar—which would

be within a fortnight—he would go abroad, say to Paris, and there, for twelve months or so, await events.

When he disclosed to Helen his evil success in the coal-pit, it was but the merest film of a hope it destroyed, for she *knew* that her brother was guilty. George and she now felt that they were linked by the possession of a common secret.

But the cloak had been found a short time before, and was in the possession of Emmeline's mother. That mother was a woman of strong passions and determined character. The first shock of the catastrophe over, her grief was almost supplanted by a rage for vengeance, in the compassing of which no doubt she vaguely imagined she would be doing something to right her daughter. Hence the protracted concealment of the murderer was bitterness to her soul, and she vowed herself to discovery and revenge as the one business of her life. In this her husband, a good deal broken by the fearful event, but still more by misfortunes of another kind which had begun to threaten him, offered her no assistance, and indeed felt neither her passion urge him nor her perseverance hold him to the pursuit.

In the neighbourhood her mind was well known, and not a few found their advantage in supplying her passion with the fuel of hope. Any hint of evidence, however small, the remotest suggestion even towards discovery, they would carry at once to her; for she was an open-handed woman, and in such case would give with a profusion that, but for the feeling concerned, would have been absurd, and did expose her to the greed of every lying mendicant within reach of her. Not unnaturally, therefore, it had occurred to a certain collier to make his way to the bottom of the shaft, on the chance—hardly of finding, but of being enabled to invent something worth reporting; and there, to the very fooling of his barren expectation, he had found the cloak.

The mother had been over to Holland, where she had instituted unavailing inquiries in the villages along the coast and among the islands, and had been home but a few days when the cloak was carried to her. In her mind it immediately associated itself with the costumes of the horrible ball,

and at once she sought the list of her guests thereat. It was before her at the very moment when the man who had been Bascombe's guide sent in to request an interview, the result of which was to turn her attention for the time in another direction: Who might the visitor to the mine have been?

Little was to be gathered in the neighbourhood beyond the facts that the letters G B were on his carpet-bag, and that a scrap of torn envelope bore what seemed the letters *mple*. She despatched the poor indications to an inquiry-office in London.

CHAPTER LXXII.

FURTHER DECISION.

THE day after his confession to Mr. Hooker, a considerable reaction took place in Lingard. He did not propose to leave his bed, and lay exhausted. He said he had caught cold. He coughed a little ; wondered why Mr. Wingfold did not come to see him ; dozed a good deal, and often woke with a start. Mrs. Ramshorn thought Helen ought to make him get up : nothing, she said, could be worse for him than lying in bed ; but Helen thought, even if her aunt were right, he must be humoured. The following day, Mr. Hooker called, inquired after him, and went up to his room to see him. There he said all he could think of to make him comfortable ; repeated that certain preliminaries had to be gone through before the commencement of the prosecution ; said that while these went on, it was better he should be in his sister's care than in prison, where, if he went at once, he most probably would die before the trial came on ; that in the meantime he was responsible for him ; that, although he had done quite right in giving himself up, he must not let what was done and could no more be helped prey too much upon his mind, lest it should render him unable to give his evidence with proper clearness, and he should be judged insane and sent to Broadmoor, which would be frightful. He ended by saying that he had had great provocation, and

that he was certain the judge would consider it in passing sentence, only he must satisfy the jury there had been no premeditation.

"I will not utter a word to excuse myself, Mr. Hooker," replied Leopold.

The worthy magistrate smiled sadly, and went away, if possible more convinced than ever of the poor lad's insanity.

The visit helped Leopold over that day, but when the next also passed, and neither did Wingfold appear nor any explanation of his absence reach him, he made up his mind to act again for himself.

The cause of the curate's apparent neglect, though ill to find, was not far to seek.

On the Monday he had, upon some pretext or other, been turned away; on the Tuesday he had been told Mr. Lingard was gone for a drive; on the Wednesday, that he was much too tired to be seen; and thereupon had at length judged it better to leave things to right themselves. If Leopold did not want to see him, it would be of no use by persistence to force his way to him; while, on the other hand, if he did want to see him, he felt convinced the poor fellow would manage to have his own way somehow.

The next morning after he had thus resolved, Leopold declared himself better, and got up and dressed. He then lay on the sofa and waited as quietly as he could until Helen went out—Mr. Faber insisting she should do so every day. It was no madness, but a burning desire for life, coupled with an utter carelessness of that which is commonly called life, that now ruled his behaviour. He tied his slippers on his feet, put on his smoking-cap, crept unseen from the house, and took the direction of the Abbey. The influence of the air, by his weakness rendered intoxicating, the strange look of everything around him, the nervous excitement of every human approach, kept him up until he reached the churchyard, across which he was crawling to find the curate's lodging, when suddenly his brain seemed to go swimming away into regions beyond the senses. He attempted to seat himself on a gravestone, but lost

consciousness, and fell at full length between that and the next one.

When Helen returned, she was horrified to find that he was gone—when or whither nobody knew: no one had missed him. Her first fear was the river, but her conscience enlightened her, and her shame could not prevent her from seeking him at the curate's. In her haste she passed him where he lay.

Shown into the curate's study, she gave a hurried glance around, and her anxiety became terror again.

"O Mr. Wingfold!" she cried, "where is Leopold?"

"I have not seen him," replied the curate, turning pale.

"Then he has thrown himself in the river!" cried Helen, and sank on a chair.

The curate caught up his hat.

"You wait here," he said, "I will go and look for him."

But Helen rose, and without another word they set off together, and again entered the churchyard. As they hurried across it, the curate caught sight of something on the ground, and springing forward, found Leopold.

"He is dead!" cried Helen in an agony, when she saw him stop and stoop.

He looked dead indeed; but what appalled her the most reassured Wingfold a little: blood had flowed freely from a cut on his eyebrow.

The curate lifted him—no hard task—out of the damp shadow, and laid him on the stone, which was warm in the sun, with his head on Helen's lap, then ran to order the carriage, and hastened back with brandy. They got a little into his mouth, but he could not swallow it; still it seemed to do him good, for presently he gave a deep sigh, and just then they heard the carriage stop at the gate. Wingfold took him up, carried him to it, got in with him in his arms, and held him on his knees until they reached the manor-house, when he carried him up-stairs and laid him on the sofa. When they had brought him round a little, he undressed him and put him to bed.

"Do not leave me," murmured Leopold, just as Helen entered the room; and she heard it.

Wingfold looked to her for the answer he was to make. Her bearing was much altered: she was both ashamed and humbled.

"Yes, Leopold," she said, "Mr. Wingfold will, I am sure, stay with you as long as he can."

"Indeed I will," assented the curate. "But I must run for Mr. Faber first."

"How did I come here?" asked Leopold, opening his eyes large upon Helen after swallowing a spoonful of the broth she held to his lips. But before she could answer him he turned sick, and by the time the doctor came was very feverish. Faber gave the necessary directions, and Wingfold walked back with him to get his prescription made up.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE CURATE AND THE DOCTOR.

"THERE is something strange about that young man's illness," said Faber, as soon as they had left the house. "I fancy you know more than you can tell; and if so, then I have committed no indiscretion in saying as much."

"Perhaps it might be an indiscretion to acknowledge as much, however," said the curate, with a smile.

"You are right. I have not been long in the place," returned Faber, "and you have had no opportunity of testing me. But I am indifferent honest as well as you, though I don't go with you in everything."

"People would have me believe you don't go with me in anything."

"They say as much, do they?" returned Faber, with some annoyance. "I thought I had been careful not to trespass on your preserves."

"As for preserves, I don't know of any," answered the curate. "There is no true bird in the grounds that won't manage somehow to escape the snare of the fowler."

"Well," said the doctor, "I know nothing about God and all that kind of thing, but, though I don't think I'm a coward exactly either, I know I should like to have your pluck."

"I haven't got any pluck," said the curate.

"Tell that to the marines," said Faber. "I daren't go and say what I think or don't think even in the bedroom of my least orthodox patient—at least, if I do, I instantly repent it—while you go on saying what you really believe Sunday after Sunday! How you can believe it I don't know, and it's no business of mine."

"Oh! yes it is!" returned Wingfold. "But as to the pluck, it may be a man's duty to say in the pulpit what he would be just as wrong to say by a sick-bed."

"That has nothing to do with the pluck! That's all I care about."

"It has everything to do with what you take for pluck. My pluck is only Don Worm."

"I don't know what you mean by that."

"It's Benedick's name, in *Much Ado about Nothing* for the conscience. *My* pluck is nothing but my conscience."

"It's a damned fine thing to have anyhow, whatever name you put upon it!" said Faber.

"Excuse me if I find your epithet more amusing than apt," said Wingfold, laughing.

"You are quite right," said Faber. "I apologise."

"As to the pluck again," Wingfold resumed, "if you think of this one fact: that my whole desire is to believe in God, and that the only thing I can be sure of sometimes is that, if there be a God, none but an honest man will ever find him: you will not then say there is much pluck in my speaking the truth?"

"I don't see that that makes it a hair easier, in the face of such a set of gaping noodles as—"

"I beg your pardon: there is more lack of conscience than of brains in the Abbey of a Sunday, I fear."

"Well, all I have to say is, I can't for the life of me see what you want to believe in a God for! It seems to me the world would go on rather better without any such fancy. Look here, now: there is young Spenser—out there at Horwood—a patient of mine. His wife died yesterday—one of the loveliest young creatures you ever saw. The poor

fellow is as bad about it as fellow can be. Well, he's one of your sort, and said to me the other day, just as you would have him, 'It's the will of God,' he said, 'and we must hold our peace.' 'Don't talk to me about God,' I said, for I couldn't stand it. 'Do you mean to tell me that if there was a God, he would have taken such a lovely creature as that away from her husband and her helpless infant at the age of two-and-twenty? I scorn to believe it."

"What did he say to that?"

"He turned as white as death, and said never a word."

"Ah! you forgot that you were taking from him his only hope of seeing her again!"

"I certainly did not think of that," said Faber.

"Even then," resumed Wingfold, "I should not say you were wrong, if you were prepared to add that you had searched every possible region of existence, and had found no God; or that you had tried every theory man had invented, or even that you were able to invent yourself, and had found none of them consistent with the being of a God. I do not say that then you would be right in your judgment, for another man, of equal weight, might have had a different experience. I only say I would not then blame you. But you must allow it a very serious thing to assert as a conviction, without such grounds as the assertor has pretty fully satisfied himself concerning, what *could* only drive the sting of death ten times deeper."

The doctor was silent.

"I doubt not you spoke in a burst of indignation; but it seems to me the indignation of a man unaccustomed to ponder the things concerning which he expresses such a positive conviction."

"You are wrong there," returned Faber; "for I was brought up in the straitest sect of the Pharisees, and know what I am saying."

"The straitest sect of the Pharisees can hardly be the school in which to gather any such idea of a God as one could wish to be a reality."

"They profess to know."

"Is that any argument of weight, they and their opinions being what they are? If there be a God, do you imagine he would choose any strait sect under the sun to be his interpreters?"

"But the question is not of the idea of a God, but of the existence of any, seeing, if he exists, he must be such as the human heart could never accept as God, inasmuch as he at least permits, if not himself enacts, cruelty. My argument to poor Spenser remains—however unwise or indeed cruel it may have been."

"I grant it a certain amount of force—as much exactly as had gone to satisfy the children whom I heard the other day agreeing that Dr. Faber was a very cruel man, for he pulled out nurse's tooth, and gave poor little baby such a nasty, nasty powder!"

"Is that a fair parallel? I must look at it."

"I think it is. What you do is often unpleasant, sometimes most painful, but it does not follow that you are a cruel man, and a hurter instead of a healer of men."

"I think there is a fault in the analogy," said Faber. "For here am I nothing but a slave to laws already existing, and compelled to work according to them. It is not my fault, therefore, that the remedies I have to use are unpleasant. But if there be a God, he has the matter in his own hands."

"There is weight and justice in your argument, which may well make the analogy appear at first sight false. But is there no theory possible that should make it perfect?"

"I do not see how there should be any. For, if you say that God is under any such compulsion as I am under, then surely the house is divided against itself, and God is not God any more."

"For my part," said the curate, "I think I *could* believe in a God who did but his imperfect best: in one all power, and not all goodness, I could not believe. But suppose that the design of God involved the perfecting of men as the *children of God*—'*I said ye are gods*'—that he would have them partakers of his own blessedness in kind—be as him-

self;—suppose his grand idea could not be contented with creatures perfect *only* by his gift, so far as that should reach, and having no willing casual share in the perfection—that is, partaking not at all of God's individuality and free-will and choice of good;—then suppose that suffering were the only way through which the individual soul could be set, in separate and self-individuality, so far apart from God that it might *will*, and so become a partaker of his singleness and freedom; and suppose that this suffering must be and had been initiated by God's taking his share, and that the infinitely greater share; suppose, next, that God saw the germ of a pure affection, say in your friend and his wife, but saw also that it was a germ so imperfect and weak that it could not encounter the coming frosts and winds of the world without loss and decay, while, if they were parted now for a few years, it would grow and strengthen and expand to the certainty of an infinitely higher and deeper and keener love through the endless ages to follow—so that by suffering should come, in place of contented decline, abortion, and death, a troubled birth of joyous result in health and immortality;—suppose all this, and what then?"

Faber was silent a moment, and then answered,

"Your theory has but one fault: it is too good to be true."

"My theory leaves plenty of difficulty, but has no such fault as that. Why, what sort of a God would content you, Mr. Faber? The one idea is too bad, the other too good, to be true. Must you expand and pare until you get one exactly to the measure of yourself ere you can accept it as thinkable or possible? Why, a less God than that would not rest your soul a week. The only possibility of believing in a God seems to me to lie in finding an idea of a God large enough, grand enough, pure enough, lovely enough to be fit to believe in."

"And have you found such, may I ask?"

"I think I am finding such."

"Where?"

"In the man of the New Testament. I have thought a

little more about these things, I fancy, than you have, Mr. Faber: I may come to be sure of something; I don't see how a man can ever be sure of *nothing*."

"Don't suppose me quite dumfoundered, though I can't answer you off-hand," said Mr. Faber, as they reached his door. "Come in with me, and I will make up the medicine myself; it will save time. There are a thousand difficulties," he resumed in the surgery, "some of them springing from peculiar points that come before one of my profession, which I doubt if you would be able to meet so readily. But about this poor fellow Lingard: know Glaston gossip says he is out of his mind."

"If I were you, Mr. Faber, I would not take pains to contradict it. He is not out of his mind, but has such trouble in it as might well drive him out. Don't you even hint at that, though."

"I understand," said Faber.

"If doctor and minister did understand each other and work together," said Wingfold, "I fancy a good deal more might be done."

"I don't doubt it. What sort of fellow is that cousin of theirs—Bascombe is his name, I believe?"

"A man to suit you, I should think," said the curate; "a man with a most tremendous power of believing in nothing."

"Come, come!" returned the doctor, "you don't know half enough about me to tell what sort of man I should like or dislike."

"Well, all I will say more of Bascombe is that if he were not conceited, he would be honest; and if he were as honest as he believes himself, he would not be so ready to judge every one dishonest who does not agree with him."

"I hope we may have another talk soon," said the doctor, searching for a cork. "Some day I may tell you a few things that may stagger you."

"Likely enough: I am only learning to walk yet," said Wingfold. "But a man may stagger and not fall, and I am ready to hear anything you choose to tell me."

Faber handed him the bottle, and he took his leave.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

HELEN AND THE CURATE.

BEFORE the morning, Leopold lay wound in the net of a low fever, almost as ill as ever, but with this difference, that his mind was far less troubled, and that even his most restless dreams no longer scared him awake to a still nearer assurance of misery. And yet many a time, as she watched by his side, it was excruciatingly plain to Helen that the stuff of which his dreams were made was the last process to the final execution of the law. She thought she could follow it all in his movements and the expressions of his countenance. At a certain point the cold dew always appeared on his forehead, after which invariably came a smile, and he would be quiet until near morning, when the same signs again appeared. Sometimes he would murmur prayers, and sometimes it seemed to Helen that he must fancy himself talking face to face with Jesus, for the look of blessed and trustful awe upon his countenance was amazing in its beauty.

For Helen herself, she was a prey to a host of changeful emotions. At one time she accused herself bitterly of having been the cause of the return of his illness ; the next a gush of gladness would swell her heart at the thought that now she had him at least safer for a while, and that he might die and so escape the whole crowd of horrible possibilities. For

George's manipulation of the magistrate could but delay the disclosure of the truth ; even should no discovery be made, Leopold must at length suspect a trick, and that would at once drive him to fresh action.

But amongst the rest, a feeling which had but lately begun to indicate its far-off presence now threatened to bring with it a deeper and more permanent sorrow : it became more and more plain to her that she had taken the evil part against the one she loved best in the world ; that she had been as a Satan to him ; had driven him back, stood almost bodily in the way to turn him from the path of peace. Whether the path he had sought to follow was the only one or not, it was the only one he knew ; and that it was at least *a* true one was proved by the fact that he had already found in it the beginnings of the peace he sought ; while she, for the avoidance of shame and pity, for the sake of the family, as she had said to herself, had pursued a course which if successful would at best have resulted in shutting him up as in a madhouse with his own inborn horrors, with vain remorse, and equally vain longing. Her conscience, now that her mind was quieter, from the greater distance to which the threatening peril had again withdrawn, had taken the opportunity of speaking louder. And she listened, but still with one question ever presented : Why might he not appropriate the consolations of the gospel without committing the suicide of surrender? She could not see that confession was the very door of refuge and safety towards which he must press.

George's absence was now again a relief, and while she feared and shrank from the severity of Wingfold, she could not help a certain indescribable sense of safety in his presence—at least so long as Leopold was too ill to talk.

For the curate, he became more and more interested in the woman who could love so strongly and yet not entirely, who suffered and must still suffer so much, and whom a faith even no greater than his own might render comparatively blessed. The desire to help her grew and grew in him, but he could see no way of reaching her. And then he began to discover one peculiar advantage belonging to the little

open chamber of the pulpit—open not only or specially to heaven above, but to so many of the secret chambers of the souls of the congregation. For what a man dares not, could not if he dared, and dared not if he could, say to another even at the time and in the place fittest of all, he can say thence, open-faced, before the whole congregation, and the person in need thereof may hear it without umbrage or the choking husk of individual application, irritating to the rejection of what truth may lie in it for him. Would that our pulpits were all in the power of such men as by suffering know the human, and by obedience the divine heart! Then would the office of instruction be no more mainly occupied by the press, but the faces of true men would everywhere be windows for the light of the Spirit to enter other men's souls, and the voice of their words would follow with the forms of what truth they saw, and the power of the Lord would speed from heart to heart. Then would men soon understand that not the form of even soundest words availeth any thing, but a new creature.

When Wingfold was in the pulpit, then, he could speak as from the secret to the secret; but elsewhere he felt, in regard to Helen, like a transport-ship filled with troops, which must go sailing around the shores of an invaded ally, in frustrate search for a landing. Oh! to help that woman, that the light of life might go up in her heart and her cheek bloom again with the rose of peace! But not a word could he speak in her presence, for he heard everything he would have said as he thought it would sound to her, and therefore he had no utterance. Is it an infirmity of certain kinds of men, or a wise provision for their protection, that the brightest forms the truth takes in their private cogitations seem to lose half their lustre and all their grace when uttered in the presence of an unreceptive nature, and they hear, as it were, their own voice reflected in a poor, dull inharmonious echo, and are disgusted?

But, on the other hand, ever in the pauses of the rushing, ever in the watery gleams of life that broke through the clouds and drifts of the fever, Leopold sought his friend,

and, finding him, shone into a brief radiance, or, missing him, gloomed back into the land of visions. The tenderness of the curate's service, the heart that showed itself in everything he did, even in the turn and expression of the ministering hand, was a kind of revelation to Helen. For while his intellect was hanging about the door, asking questions, and uneasily shifting hither and thither in its unloved perplexities, the spirit of the Master had gone by it unseen, and entered into the chamber of his heart.

After preaching the sermon last recorded, there came a reaction of doubt and depression on the mind of the curate, greater than usual. Had he not gone farther than his right? Had he not implied more conviction than was his? Words could not go beyond his satisfaction with what he found in the gospel, or the hopes for the range of his conscious life springing therefrom, but was he not now making people suppose him more certain of the *fact* of these things than he was? He was driven to console himself with the reflection that so long as he had had no such intention, even if he had been so carried away by the delight of his heart as to give such an impression, it mattered little: what was it to other people what he believed or how he believed? If he had not been untrue to himself, no harm would follow. Was a man never to talk from the highest in him to the forgetting of the lower? Was a man never to be carried beyond himself and the regions of his knowledge? If so, then farewell poetry and prophecy—yea, all grand discovery! for things must be foreseen ere they can be realised—apprehended ere they be comprehended. This much he could say for himself, and no more: that he was ready to lay down his life for the mere *chance*, if he might so use the word, of these things being true; nor did he argue any devotion in that, seeing life without them would be to him a waste of unreality. He could bear witness to no facts, but to the truth. to the loveliness and harmony and righteousness and safety that he saw in the idea of the Son of Man—as he read it in the story. He dared not say what, in a time of persecution, torture might work upon him, but he felt right hopeful that, even were he

base enough to deny him, any cock might crow him back to repentance. At the same time he saw plain enough that even if he gave his body to be burned, it were no sufficing assurance of his Christianity: nothing could satisfy him of that less than the conscious presence of the perfect charity. Without that he was still outside the kingdom, wandering in a dream around its walls.

Difficulties went on presenting themselves; at times he would be whelmed in the tossing waves of contradiction and impossibility; but still his head would come up into the air, and he would get a breath before he went down again. And with every fresh conflict, every fresh gleam of doubtful victory, the essential idea of the Master looked more and more lovely. And he began to see the working of his doubts on the growth of his heart and soul—both widening and realising his faith, and preventing it from becoming faith in an idea of God instead of in the living God—the God beyond as well as in the heart that thought and willed and imagined.

He had much time for reflection as he sat silent by the bedside of Leopold. Sometimes Helen would be sitting near, though generally when he arrived she went out for her walk, but never anything came to him he could utter to her. And she was one of those who learn little from other people. A change must pass upon her ere she could be rightly receptive. Some vapour or other that clouded her being must be driven to the winds first.

Mrs. Ramshorn had become at least reconciled to the frequent presence of the curate, partly from the testimony of Helen, partly from the witness of her own eyes to the quality of his ministrations. She was by no means one of the loveliest among women, yet she had a heart, and could appreciate some kinds of goodness which the arrogance of her relation to the church did not interfere to hide—for nothing is so deadening to the divine as an habitual dealing with the outsides of holy things—and she became half friendly and quite courteous when she met the curate on the stair, and would now and then, when she thought of it, bring him a glass of wine as he sat by the bedside.

CHAPTER LXXV.

AN EXAMINATION.

THE acquaintance between the draper and the gate-keeper rapidly ripened into friendship. Very generally, as soon as he had shut his shop, Drew would walk to the park gate to see Polwarth ; and three times a week at least, the curate made one of the party. Much was then talked, more was thought, and, I venture to say, more yet was understood.

One evening the curate went earlier than usual, and had tea with the Polwarths.

"Do you remember," he asked of his host, "once putting to me the question, what our Lord came into this world for?"

"I do," answered Polwarth.

"And you remember I answered you wrong : I said it was to save the world?"

"I do. But remember, I said *primarily;* for of course he did come to save the world."

"Yes, just so you put it. Well, I think I can answer the question correctly now : and in learning the true answer, I have learned much. Did he not come first of all to do the will of his Father? Was not his Father first with him always and in everything—his fellowmen next; for they were his Father's?"

"I need not say it—you know that you are right. Jesus is tenfold a real person to you, is he not, since you discovered that truth?"

"I think so; I hope so. It does seem as if a grand, simple reality had begun to dawn upon me out of the fog—the form as of a man pure and simple, *because* the eternal son of the Father."

"And now, may I not ask, are you able to accept the miracles, things in themselves so improbable?"

"If we suppose the question settled as to whether the man was what he said, then all that remains is to ask whether the works reported of him are consistent with what you can see of the character of the man."

"And to you they seem—?"

"Some consistent, others not. Concerning the latter I look for more light."

"Meantime let me ask you a question about them: What was the main object of the miracles?"

"One thing at least I have learned, Mr. Polwarth, and that is not to answer any question of yours in a hurry," said Wingfold. "I will, if you please, take this one home with me, and hold the light to it."

"Do," said Polwarth, "and you will find it return you the light threefold. One word more ere Mr. Drew comes: do you still think of giving up your curacy?"

"I have almost forgotten I ever thought of such a thing. Whatever energies I may or may not have, I know one thing for certain: that I could not devote them to anything else I should think entirely worth doing. Indeed, nothing else seems interesting enough, nothing to repay the labour, but the telling of my fellow-men about the one man who is the truth, and to know whom is the life. Even if there be no hereafter, I would live my time believing in a grand thing that ought to be true if it is not. No facts can take the place of truths; and if these be not truths, then is the loftiest part of our nature a waste. Let me hold by the better than the actual, and fall into nothingness off the same precipice with Jesus and John and Paul and a thousand more, who were

lovely in their lives, and with their death make even the nothingness into which they have passed like the garden of the Lord. I will go farther, Polwarth, and say I would rather die for evermore believing as Jesus believed, than live for evermore believing as those that deny him. If there be no God, I feel assured that this existence is and could be but a chaos of contradictions whence can emerge nothing worthy to be called a truth, nothing worth living for.—No, I will not give up my curacy. I will teach that which *is* good, even if there should be no God to make a fact of it, and I will spend my life on it in the growing hope, which *may* become assurance, that there is indeed a perfect God, worthy of being the Father of Jesus Christ, and that it was *because* they are true that these things were lovely to me and to so many men and women, of whom some have died for them and some would be yet ready to die."

"I thank my God to hear you say so. Nor will you stand still there," said Polwarth. "But here comes Mr. Drew."

CHAPTER LXXVI.

IMMORTALITY.

"HOW goes business?" said Polwarth, when the new-comer had seated himself.

"That is hardly a question I look for from you, sir," returned the draper, smiling all over his round face, which looked more than ever like a moon of superior intelligence. "For me, I am glad to leave it behind me in the shop."

"True business can never be left in any shop. It is a care, white or black, that sits behind every horseman."

"That is fact; and with me it has just taken a new shape," said Drew, "for I have come with quite a fresh difficulty. Since I saw you last, Mr. Polwarth, a strange and very uncomfortable doubt has rushed in upon me, and I find myself altogether unfit to tackle it. I have no weapons—not a single argument of the least weight. I wonder if it be a law of nature that no sooner shall a man get into a muddle with one thing, than a thousand other muddles shall come pouring in upon him, as if Muddle itself were going to swallow him up! Here am I just beginning to get a little start in honester ways when up comes the ugly head of the said doubt, swelling itself more and more to look like a fact—namely, that after this world there is nothing for us; nothing at all to be had anyhow; that as we came, so we go; into life, out of life; that, having been nothing before, we shall be nothing

after! The flowers come back in the spring and the corn in the autumn, but they ain't the same flowers or the same corn. They're just as different as the new generations of men."

"There's no pretence that we come back either. We only think we don't go into the ground, but away somewhere else."

"You can't prove that."

"No."

"And you don't know anything about it!"

"Not much—but enough I think."

"Why, even those that profess to believe it, scoff at the idea of an apparition—a ghost!"

"That's the fault of the ghosts, I suspect—or their reporters. I don't care about them myself. I prefer the tale of one who, they say, rose again and brought his body with him."

"Yes; but he was only one!"

"Except two or three whom, they say, he brought to life."

"Still there are but three or four."

"To tell you the truth, I do not care much to argue the point with you. It is by no means a matter of the *first* importance whether we live for ever or not."

"Mr Polwarth!" exclaimed the draper, in such astonishment mingled with horror as proved he was not in immediate danger of becoming an advocate of the doctrine of extinction.

The gate-keeper smiled what, but for a peculiar expression of undefinable good in it, might have been called a knowing smile.

"Suppose a thing were in itself not worth having," he said, "would it be any great enhancement of it as a gift to add the assurance that the possession of it was eternal? Most people think it a fine thing to have a bit of land to call their own and leave to their children; but suppose a stinking and undrainable swamp, full of foul springs: what consolation would it be to the proprietor of that to know, while the world lasted, not a human being would once dispute its possession with any fortunate descendant holding it?"

The draper only stared, but his stare was a thorough one. The curate sat waiting, with both amusement and interest, for what would follow; he saw the direction in which the little man was driving.

"You astonish me!" said Mr. Drew, recovering his mental breath. "How can you compare God's gift to such a horrible thing! Where should we be without life?"

Rachel burst out laughing, and the curate could not help joining her. "Mr. Drew," said Polwarth half merrily, "are you going to help me drag my chain out to its weary length, or are you too much shocked at the doubtful condition of its first links to touch them? I promise you the last shall be of bright gold."

"I beg your pardon," said the draper; "I might have known you didn't mean it."

"On the contrary, I mean everything I say, and that literally. Perhaps I don't mean everything you fancy I mean. Tell me, then, would life be worth having on any and every possible condition?"

"Certainly not."

"You know some, I daresay, who would be glad to be rid of life such as it is, and such as they suppose it must continue?"

"I don't."

"I do."

"I have always understood that everybody clung to life."

"Most people do; everybody certainly does not: Job, for instance."

"They say that is but a poem."

"*But* a poem! *Even* a poem—a representation true not of this or that individual, but of the race! There *are* such persons as would gladly be rid of life, and in their condition all would feel the same. Somewhat similar is the state of those who profess unbelief in the existence of God: none of them expect, and few of them seem to wish, to live for ever! At least so I am told."

"That is no wonder," said the draper; "if they don't believe in God, I mean."

"Then there I have you! There you allow life to be not worth having, if on certain evil conditions."

"I admit it, then."

"And I repeat that to prove life endless is not a matter of the *first* importance. And now I will go a little farther. Does it follow that life is worth having because a man would like to have it for ever?"

"I should say so: who should be a better judge than the man himself?"

"Let us look at it a moment. Suppose—we will take a strong case—suppose a man whose whole delight is in cruelty, and who has such plentiful opportunity of indulging the passion that he finds it well with him; such a man, of course, would desire such a life to endure for ever: is such a life worth having? were it well that man should be immortal?"

"Not for others."

"Still less, I say, for himself."

"In the judgment of others, doubtless; but to himself he would be happy."

"Call his horrible satisfaction happiness, then, and leave aside the fact that in his own nature it is a horror and not a bliss: a time must come when, in the exercise of his delight, he shall have destroyed all life beside, and made himself alone with himself in an empty world: will he then find life worth having?"

"Then he ought to live for punishment."

"With that we have nothing to do now, but there you have given me an answer to my question, whether a man's judgment that his life is worth having proves immortality a thing to be desired."

"I have. I understand now."

"It follows that there is something of prior importance to the possession of immortality: what is that something?"

"I suppose that the immortality itself should be worth possessing."

"Yes; that the life should be such that it were well it should be endless. And what then if it be not such?"

"The question then would be whether it could not be made such."

"You are right. And wherein consists the essential inherent worthiness of a life as life? The only perfect idea of life is—a unit, self-existent and creative. That is God, the only one. But to this idea, in its kind, must every life, to be complete as life, correspond; and the human correspondence to self-existence is that the man should round and complete himself by taking into himself his origin; by going back and in his own will adopting that origin, rooting therein afresh in the exercise of his own freedom and in all the energy of his own self-roused will; in other words, that the man say, 'I will be after the will of the creating *I*;' that he see and say with his whole being that to will the will of God in himself and for himself and concerning himself is the highest possible condition of a man. Then has he completed his cycle by turning back upon his history, laying hold of his cause, and willing his own being in the will of the only I AM. This is the rounding, re-creating, unifying of the man. This is religion; and all that gathers not with this, scatters abroad."

"And then," said Drew, with some eagerness, "lawfully comes the question, 'Shall I or shall I not live for ever?'"

"Pardon me; I think not," returned the little prophet. "I think rather we have done with it for ever. The man with life so in himself will not dream of asking whether he shall live. It is only in the twilight of a half-life, holding in it at once much wherefore it should desire its own continuance and much that renders it unworthy of continuance, that the doubtful desire of immortality can arise. Do you remember"—here Polwarth turned to Wingfold—"my mentioning to you once a certain manuscript of strange interest—to me, at least, and Rachel—which a brother of mine left behind him?"

"I remember it perfectly," answered the curate.

"It seems so to mingle with all I ever think on this question that I should much like, if you gentlemen would allow me, to read some extracts from it."

Nothing could have been heartier than the assurance of both the men that they could but be delighted to listen to anything he chose to give them.

"I must first tell you, however," said Polwarth, "merely to protect you from certain disturbing speculations otherwise sure to present themselves, that my poor brother was mad, and that what I now read portions of seemed to him no play of the imagination, but a record of absolute fact. Some parts are stranger and less intelligible than others, but through it all there is abundance of intellectual movement and what seems to me a wonderful keenness to perceive the movements and arrest the indications of an imagined consciousness."

As he spoke, the little man was opening a cabinet in which he kept his precious things. He brought from it a good-sized quarto volume, neatly bound in morocco, with gilt edges, which he seemed to handle not merely with respect but with tenderness.

The heading of the next chapter is my own, and does not belong to the manuscript.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

PASSAGES FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE WANDERING JEW.

"'I HAVE at length been ill, very ill, once more, and for many reasons foreign to the weightiest, which I had forgotten, I had hoped that I was going to die. But therein I am as usual deceived and disappointed. That I have been out of my mind I know by having returned to the real knowledge of what I am. The conscious present has again fallen together and made a whole with the past, and that whole is my personal identity.

"'How I broke loose from the bonds of a madness which, after so many and heavy years of uninterruped sanity, had at length laid hold upon me, I will now relate.

"'I had, as I have said, been very ill—with some sort of fever that had found fit rooting in a brain overwearied from not having been originally constructed to last so long. Whether it came not of an indwelling demon, or a legion of demons, I cannot tell—God knows. Surely I was as one possessed. I was mad, whether for years or but for moments—who can tell? I cannot. Verily it seems for many years; but, knowing well the truth concerning the relations of time in him that dreameth and waketh from his dream, I place no confidence in the testimony of the impressions left upon my seeming memory. I can, however, trust it sufficiently as to

the character of the illusions that then possessed me. I imagined myself an Englishman called Polwarth, of an ancient Cornish family. Indeed, I had in my imagination as Polwarth gone through the history, every day of it, with its sunrise and sunset, of more than half a lifetime. I had a brother who was deformed and a dwarf, and a daughter who was like him; and the only thing throughout the madness that approached a consciousness of my real being and history was the impression that these things had come upon me because of a certain grievous wrong I had at one time committed, which wrong, however, I had quite forgotten—and could ill have imagined in its native hideousness.

"'But one morning, just as I woke, after a restless night filled with dreams, I was aware of a half-embodied shadow in my mind—whether thought or memory or imagination I could not tell, and the strange thing was that it darkly radiated from it the conviction that I must hold and identify it, or be for ever lost to myself. Therefore, with all the might of my will to retain the shadow, and all the energy of my recollection to recall that of which it was the vague shadow, I concentrated the whole powers of my spiritual man upon the phantom thought, to fix and retain it.

"'Every one knows what it is to hunt such a formless fact. Evanescent as a rainbow, its whole appearance, from the first, is that of a thing in the act of vanishing. It is a thing that *was* known, but, from the moment consciousness turned its lantern upon it, began to become invisible. For a time during the close pursuit that follows, it seems only to be turning corner after corner to evade the mind's eye, but behind every corner it leaves a portion of itself; until at length, although when finally cannot be told, it is gone so utterly that the mind remains aghast in the perplexity of the doubt whether ever there was a thought there at all.

"'Throughout my delusion of an English existence, I had been tormented in my wakings with such thought-phantoms, and ever had I followed them as an idle man may follow a flitting marsh-fire. Indeed, I had grown so much interested in the phenomenon and its possible indications that I had

invented various theories to account for them, some of which seemed to myself original and ingenious, while the common idea that they are vague reminiscences of a former state of being I had again and again examined, and as often entirely rejected as in no way tenable or verisimilar.

"'But upon the morning to which I have referred, I succeeded, for the first time, in fixing, capturing, identifying the haunting, fluttering thing. That moment the bonds of my madness were broken. My past returned upon me. I had but to think in any direction, and every occurrence, with time and place and all its circumstance, rose again before me. The awful fact of my own being once more stood bare—awful always, tenfold more awful after such a period of blissful oblivion thereof: I was, I had been, I am now, as I write, the man so mysterious in crime, so unlike all other men in his punishment, known by various names in various lands—here in England as the Wandering Jew. Ahasuerus was himself again, alas!—himself and no other. Wife, daughter, brother vanished, and returned only in dreams. I was and remain the wanderer, the undying, the repentant, the unforgiven. O heart! O weary feet! O eyes that have seen and nevermore shall see, until they see once and are blinded for ever! Back upon my soul rushes the memory of my deed like a storm of hail mingled with fire, flashing through every old dry channel, that it throbs and writhes anew, scorched at once and torn with the poisonous burning.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE WANDERING JEW.

"'IT was a fair summer morning in holy Jerusalem, and I sat and wrought at my trade—for I sewed a pair of sandals for the feet of the high-priest Caiaphas. And I wrought diligently, for it behooved me to cease an hour ere set of sun : for it was the day of preparation for the eating of the Passover.

"'Now all that night there had been a going to and fro in the city, for the chief priests and their followers had at length laid hands upon him that was called Jesus, whom some believed to be the Messiah, and others, with my fool-self amongst them, an arch impostor and blasphemer. For I was of the house of Caiaphas, and heartily did he desire that the man my lord declared a deceiver of the people should meet with the just reward of his doings. Thus I sat and worked, and thought and rejoiced ; and the morning passed, and the noon came.

"'It was a day of sultry summer, and the street burned beneath the sun, and I sat in the shadow and looked out upon the glare, and ever I wrought at the sandals of my lord with many fine stitches, in cunning workmanship. All had been for some time very still, when suddenly I thought I heard a far-off tumult. And soon came the idle children, who ever run first that they be not swallowed up of the

crowd ; and they ran, and looked behind as they ran. And after them came the crowd, crying and shouting, and swaying hither and thither ; and in the midst of it arose the one arm of a cross, beneath the weight of which that same Jesus bent so low that I saw him not. Truly, said I, he hath not seldom borne heavier burdens in the workshop of his father the Galilean, but now his sins and his idleness have found him, and taken from him his vigour; for he that despiseth the law shall perish, while they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. For I was wroth with the man who taught the people to despise the great ones that administered the law, and give honour to the small ones who only kept it. Besides, he had driven my father's brother from the court of the Gentiles with a whip, which truly hurt him not outwardly, but stung him to the soul ; and yet that very temple which he pretended thus to honour, he had threatened to destroy and build again in three days ! Such were thethoughts of my heart ; and when I learned from the boys that it was in truth Jesus of Nazareth who passed on his way to Calvary to be crucified, my heart leaped within me at the thought that the law had at length overtaken the malefactor. I laid down the sandal and my awl, and rose and went forth and stood in the front of my shop. And Jesus drew nigh, and as he passed, lo ! the end of the cross dragged upon the street. And one in the crowd came behind and lifted it up and pushed therewith, so that Jesus staggered and had nigh fallen. Then would he fain have rested the arm of the cross on the stone by which I was wont to go up into my shop from the street. But I cried out and drove him thence, saying scornfully, *Go on, Jesus; go on. Truly thou restest not on stone of mine!* Then he turned his eyes upon me, and said, *I go indeed, but thou goest not*, and therewith he rose again under the weight of the cross, and staggered on.

"'And I followed in the crowd to Calvary.'"

Here the reader paused, and said,

"I can give you but a few passages now. You see it is a large manuscript. I will therefore choose some of those that bear upon the subject of which we have been talking.

A detailed account of the crucifixion follows here, which I could not bring myself to read aloud. The eclipse is in it, and the earthquake, and the white faces of the risen dead gleaming through the darkness about the cross. It ends thus :

"'And all the time, I stood not far from the foot of the cross, nor dared go nearer ; for around it were his mother and they that were with her, and my heart was sore for her also. And I would have withdrawn my foot from the place where I stood, and gone home to weep, but something, I know not what, held me there, as it were, rooted to the ground. At length the end was drawing near. He opened his mouth and spake to his mother and the disciple who stood by her, but truly I know not what he said ; for as his eyes turned from them, they looked upon me, and my heart died within me. He said naught, but his eyes had that in them that would have slain me with sorrow had not death, although I knew it not, already shrunk from my presence, daring no more come nigh such a malefactor.—O Death, how gladly would I build thee a temple, set thee in a lofty place, and worship thee with the sacrifice of vultures on a fire of dead men's bones, wouldst thou but hear my cry !—But I rave again in my folly. God forgive me. All the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change come.—With that look—a well of everlasting tears in my throbbing brain —my feet were unrooted, and I turned and fled.'"

Here the reader paused again, and turned over many leaves.

"' . . And ever as I passed at night through the lands, when I came to a cross by the wayside, thereon would I climb, and, winding my arms about its arms and my feet about its stem, would there hang in the darkness or the moon, in rain or hail, in wind or snow or frost, until my sinews gave way and my body dropped, and I knew no more until I found myself lying at its foot in the morning. For, ever in such case, I lay without sense until again the sun shone upon me.

"' . . And if ever the memory of that look passed

from me, then straightway I began to long for death, and so longed until the memory and the power of the look came again, and with the sorrow in my soul came the patience to live. And truly, although I speak of forgetting and remembering, such motions of my spirit in me were not as those of another man ; in me they are not measured by the scale of men's lives : they are not of years, but of centuries ; for the seconds of my life are ticked by a clock whose pendulum swings through an arc of motionless stars.

"' . . Once I had a vision of Death. Methinks it must have been a precursive vapour of the madness that afterwards enfolded me, for I know well that there is not one called Death, that he is but a word needful for the weakness of human thought and the poverty of human speech ; that he is a no-being, and but a change from that which is. I had a vision of Death, I say.

"'I was walking over a wide plain of sand, like Egypt, so that ever and anon I looked around me to see if nowhere, from the base of the horizon, the pyramids cut their triangle out of the blue night of heaven ; but I saw none. The stars came down and sparkled on the dry sands, and all was waste and wide desolation. The air also was still as the air of a walled-up tomb, where there are but dry bones, and not even the wind of an evil vapour that rises from decay. And through the dead air came ever the low moaning of a distant sea, towards which my feet did bear me. I had been journeying thus for years, and in their lapse it had grown but a little louder. Suddenly I was aware that I was not alone. A dim figure strode beside me, vague, but certain of presence. And I feared him not, seeing that which men fear the most was itself that which by me was the most desired. So I stood and turned and would have spoken. But the shade that seemed not a shadow went on and regarded me not. Then I also turned again towards the moaning of the sea and went on. And lo ! the shade which had gone before until it seemed but as a vapour among the stars, was again by my side walking. And I said and stood not, but walked

on : "Thou shade that art not a shadow, seeing there shineth no sun or moon, and the stars are many, and the one slayeth the shadow of the other, what art thou, and wherefore goest thou by my side? Think not to make me afraid, for I fear nothing in the universe but that which I love the best." (I spake of the eyes of the Lord Jesus.) Then the shade that seemed no shadow answered me, and spake and said, "Little knowest thou what I am, seeing the very thing thou sayest I am not, that I am, and naught else, and there is no other but me. I am Shadow, the shadow, the only shadow —none such as those from which the light hideth in terror, yet like them, for life hideth from me and turneth away; yet if life were not, neither were I, for I am nothing; and yet again, so soon as anything is, there am I, and needed no maker, but came of myself, for I am Death." "Ha! Death!" I cried, and would have cast myself before him with outstretched arms of worshipful entreaty; but lo! there was a shadow upon the belt of Orion, and no shadow by my side! and I sighed, and walked on towards the ever-moaning sea. Then again the shadow was by my side. And again I spake and said, "Thou thing of flitting and return, I despise thee, for thou wilt not abide the conflict." And I would have cast myself upon him and wrestled with him there, for defeat and not for victory. But I could not lay hold upon him. "Thou art a powerless nothing," I cried; "I will not even defy thee." "Thou wouldst provoke me," said the shadow, "but it availeth not. I cannot be provoked. Truly I am but a shadow, yet know I my own worth, for I am the Shadow of the Almighty, and where he is there am I." "Thou art nothing," I said. "Nay, nay, I am not Nothing. Thou, nor any man—God only knoweth what that word meaneth. I am but the shadow of Nothing, and when *thou* sayest *nothing*, thou meanest only me; but what God meaneth when he sayeth *Nothing*—the nothing without him, that nothing which is no shadow but the very substance of Unbeing—no created soul can know." "Then art thou not Death?" I asked. "I am what thou thinkest of when thou sayest *Death*," he answered, "but I am not Death." "Alas!

then, why comest thou to me in the desert places, for I did think thou wast Death indeed, and couldst take me unto thee so that I should be no more." "That is what death cannot do for thee," said the shadow; "none but he that created thee can cause that thou shouldst be no more. Thou art until he will that thou be not. I have heard it said amongst the wise that, hard as it is to create, it is harder still to uncreate. Truly I cannot tell. But wouldst thou be uncreated by the hand of Death? Wouldst thou have thy no-being the gift of a shadow?" Then I thought of the eyes of the Lord Jesus, and the look he cast upon me, and I said, "No: I would not be carried away of Death. I would be fulfilled of Life, and stand before God for ever." Then once again the belt of Orion grew dim, and I saw the shadow no more. And yet did I long for Death, for I thought he might bring me to those eyes, and the pardon that lay in them.

. . . . . .

"'But again, as the years went on and each brought less hope than that before it, I forgot the look the Lord had cast upon me, and in the weariness of the life that was mortal and yet would not cease, in the longing after the natural end of that which against nature endured, I began to long even for the end of being itself. And in a city of the Germans I found certain men of my own nation who said unto me, "Fear not, Ahasuerus; there is no life beyond the grave. Live on until thy end come, and cease thy complaints. Who is there among us who would not gladly take upon him thy judgment, and live until he was weary of living?" "Yea, but to live after thou art weary?" I said. But they heeded me not, answering me and saying, "Search thou the Scriptures, even the Book of the Law, and see if thou find there one leaf of this gourd of a faith that hath sprung up in a night. Verily, this immortality is but a flash in the brain of men that would rise above their fate. Sayeth Moses, or sayeth Job, or sayeth David or Daniel a word of the matter?" And I listened unto them, and became of their mind. But therewithal the longing after death returned with tenfold force, and I rose up and girt my garment about me, and went forth once

more to search for him whom I now took for the porter of the gate of eternal silence and unfelt repose. And I said unto myself as I walked, What in the old days was sweeter, when I was weary with my labour of making of shoes, than to find myself dropping into the death of sleep! how much sweeter then must it not be to sink into the sleepiest of sleeps, the father-sleep, the mother-bosomed death of nothingness and unawaking rest! Then shall all this endless whir of the wheels of thought and desire be over; then welcome the night whose darkness does not seethe, and which no morning shall ever stir!

. . . . . .

"'And wherever armies were drawing nigh, each to the other, and the day of battle was near, thither I flew in hot haste, that I might be first upon the field, and ready to welcome hottest peril. I fought not, for I would not slay those that counted it not the good thing to be slain, as I counted it. But had the armies been of men that loved death like me, how had I raged among them then, even as the angel Azrael, to give them their sore-desired rest! for I loved and hated not my kind, and would diligently have mown them down out of the stinging air of life into the soft balm of the sepulchre. But what they sought not, and I therefore would not give, that searched I after the more eagerly for myself. And my sight grew so keen that, when yet no bigger than a mote in the sunbeam, I could always descry the vulture-scout hanging aloft over the field of destiny. Then would I hasten on and on, until a swoop would have brought him straight on my head.

. . . . . .

"'And with that a troop of horsemen, horses and men mad with living fear, came with a level rush towards the spot where I sat, faint with woe. And I sprang up and bounded to meet them, throwing my arms aloft and shouting as one who would turn a herd. And like a wave of the rising tide before a swift wind, a wave that sweeps on and breaks not, they came hard-buffeting over my head. Ah! that was a torrent indeed!—a thunderous succession of

solid billows, alive, hurled along by the hurricane-fear in the heart of them! For one moment only I felt and knew what I lay beneath, and then for a time there was nothing. I woke in silence, and thought I was dying; that I had all but passed across the invisible line between, and in a moment there would be for evermore nothing and nothing. Then followed again an empty space, as it seemed. "And now I am dead and gone," I said, "and shall wander no more." And with that came the agony of hell, for, lo! still *I thought!* And I said to myself, "Alas! O God! for notwithstanding I no more see or hear or taste or smell or touch, and my body hath dropped from me, still am I Ahasuerus, the Wanderer, and must go on and on and on, blind and deaf, through the unutterable wastes that know not the senses of man—nevermore to find rest! Alas! Death is not death, seeing he slayeth but the leathern bottle, and spilleth not the wine of life upon the earth. Alas! alas! for I cannot die!" And with that a finger twitched, and I shouted aloud for joy: I was yet in the body! And I sprang to my feet jubilant, and, lame and bruised and broken-armed, tottered away after Death, who yet might hold the secret of eternal repose. I was alive, but yet there was hope, for Death was yet before me! I was alive, but I had not died, and who could tell but I might yet find the lovely night that hath neither clouds nor stars! I had not passed into the land of the dead and found myself yet living! The wise men of my nation in the city of the Almains might yet be wise! And for an hour I rejoiced, and was glad greatly.

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CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE WANDERING JEW.

"' T was midnight, and sultry as hell. All day not a breath had stirred. The country through which I passed was level as the sea that had once flowed above it. My heart had almost ceased to beat, and I was weary as the man who is too weary to sleep outright, and labours in his dreams. I slumbered and yet walked on. My blood flowed scarce faster than the sluggish water in the many canals I crossed on my weary way. And ever I thought to meet the shadow that was and was not death. But this was no dream. Just on the stroke of midnight, I came to the gate of a large city, and the watchers let me pass. Through many an ancient and lofty street I wandered like a ghost in a dream, knowing no one, and caring not for myself, and at length reached an open space where stood a great church, the cross upon whose spire seemed bejewelled with the stars among which it dwelt. And in my soul I said, O Lord Jesus! and went up to the base of the tower, and found the door thereof open to my hand. Then with my staff I ascended the winding stairs, until I reached the open sky. And the stairs went still winding, on and on, up towards the stars. And with my staff I ascended, and arose into the sky, until I stood at the foot of the cross of stone.

"'Ay me! how the centuries without haste, without rest,

had glided along since I stood by the cross of dishonour and pain! And God had not grown weary of his life yet, but I had grown so weary in my very bones that weariness was my element, and I had ceased almost to note it. And now, high uplifted in honour and worship over every populous city, stood the cross among the stars! I scrambled up the pinnacles, and up on the carven stem of the cross, for my sinews were as steel, and my muscles had dried and hardened until they were as those of the tiger or the great serpent. So I climbed and lifted up myself until I reached the great arms of the cross and over them flung my arms, as was my wont, and entwined the stem with my legs, and there hung three hundred feet above the roofs of the houses. And as I hung the moon rose and cast the shadow of me Ahasuerus upon the cross, up against the Pleiades. And as if dull Nature were offended thereat, nor understood the offering of my poor sacrifice, the clouds began to gather, like the vultures—no one could have told whence. From all sides around they rose, and the moon was blotted out, and they gathered and rose until they met right over the cross. And when they closed, then the lightning brake forth, and the thunder with it, and it flashed and thundered above and around and beneath me, so that I could not tell which voice belonged to which arrow, for all were mingled in one great confusion and uproar. And the people in the houses below heard the sound of the thunder, and they looked from their windows and they saw the storm raving and flashing about the spire, which stood the heart of the agony, and they saw something hang there, even upon its cross, in the form of a man, and they came from their houses, and the whole space beneath was filled with people, who stood gazing up at the marvel. *A miracle! A miracle!* they cried; and truly it was no miracle—it was only me Ahasuerus, the wanderer, taking thought concerning his crime against the crucified. Then came a great light all about me, such light for shining as I had never before beheld, and indeed I saw it not all with my eyes, but the greater part with my soul, which surely is the light of the eyes themselves. And I said to myself,

Doubtless the Lord is at hand, and he cometh to me as late to the blessed Saul of Tarsus, who was *not* the chief of sinners, but I—Ahasuerus, the accursed. And the thunder burst like the bursting of a world in the furnace of the sun ; and whether it was that the lightning struck me, or that I dropped, as was my custom, outwearied from the cross, I know not, but thereafter I lay at its foot among the pinnacles, and when the people looked again the miracle was over, and they returned to their houses and slept. And the next day, when I sought the comfort of the bath, I found upon my side the figure of a cross, and the form of a man hanging thereupon as I had hung, depainted in a dark colour as of lead, plain upon the flesh of my side over my heart. Here was a miracle indeed ! but verily I knew not whether therefrom to gather comfort or despair.

"'And it was night as I went into a village among the mountains, through the desert places of which I had all that day been wandering. And never before had my condition seemed to me so hopeless. There was not one left upon the earth who had ever seen me knowing me, and although there went a tale of such a man as I, yet faith had so far vanished from the earth, that for a thing to be marvellous, however just, was sufficient reason wherefore no man, to be counted wise, should believe the same. For the last fifty years I had found not one that would receive my testimony. For when I told them the truth concerning myself, saying as I now say, and knowing the thing for true—that I was Ahasuerus, whom the Word had banished from his home in the regions governed of Death, shutting against him the door of the tomb that he should not go in—every man said I was mad, and would hold with me no manner of communication, more than if I had been possessed with a legion of swine-loving demons. Therefore was I cold at heart, and lonely to the very root of my being. And thus it was with me that midnight as I entered the village among the mountains.—Now all therein slept, so even that not a dog barked at sound of my footsteps. But suddenly, and my soul yet quivers with

dismay at the remembrance, a yell of horror tore its way from the throat of every sleeper at once, and shot into every cranny of the many-folded mountains, that my soul knocked shaking against the sides of my body, and I also shrieked aloud with the keen terror of the cry. For surely there was no sleeper there, man, woman, or child, who yelled not aloud in an agony of fear. And I knew that it could only be because of the unseen presence in their street of the outcast, the homeless, the loveless, the wanderer for ever, who had refused a stone to his maker whereon to rest his cross. Truly I know not whence else could have come that cry. And I looked to see that all the inhabitants of the village should rush out upon me, and go for to slay the unslayable in their agony. But the cry passed, and after the cry came again the stillness. And for very dread lest yet another such cry should enter my ears, and turn my heart to a jelly, I did hasten my steps to leave the dwellings of the children of the world, and pass out upon the pathless hills again. But as I turned and would have departed, the door of a house opened over against where I stood ; and as it opened, lo ! a sharp gust of wind from the mountains swept along the street, and out into the wind came running a girl, clothed only in the garment of the night. And the wind blew upon her, and by the light of the moon I saw that her hands and her feet were rough and brown, as of one that knew labour and hardship, but her body was dainty and fair, and moulded in loveliness. Her hair blew around her like a rain cloud, so that it almost blinded her, and truly she had much ado to clear it from her face, as a half-drowned man would clear from his face the waters whence he hath been lifted ; and like two stars of light from amidst the cloud gazed forth the eyes of the girl. And she looked upon me with the courage of a child, and she said unto me, Stranger, knowest thou wherefore was that cry? Was it thou who did so cry in our street in the night? And I answered her and said, Verily not I, maiden, but I too heard the cry, and it shook my soul within me.—What seemed it unto thee like, she asked, for truly I slept, and know only the terror thereof and not the sound?

And I said, It seemed unto me that every soul in the village cried out at once in some dream of horror.—I cried not out, she said ; for I slept and dreamed, and the dream was such that I know verily I cried not out. And the maiden was lovely in her innocence. And I said : And was thy dream such, maiden, that thou wouldst not refuse but wouldst tell it to an old man like me. And with that the wind came down from the mountain like a torrent of wolves, and it laid hold upon me and swept me from the village, and I fled before it, and could not stay my steps until I got me into the covert of a hollow rock. And scarce had I turned in thither when, lo ! thither came the maiden also, flying in my footsteps, and driven of the self-same mighty wind. And I turned in pity and said, Fear not, my child. Here is but an old man with a sore and withered heart, and he will not harm thee.—I fear thee not, she answered, else would I not have followed thee.—Thou didst not follow me of thine own inclining, I said, but the wind that came from the mountains and swept me before it, did bear thee after me.—Truly I know of no wind, she said, but the wind of my own following of thee. Wherefore didst thou flee from me ?—Nay ! but wherefore didst thou follow me, maiden ?—That I might tell thee my dream, to the which thou didst desire to hearken. For lo ! as I slept I dreamed that a man came unto me and said, Behold ! I am the unresting and undying one, and my burden is greater than I can bear, for Death who befriendeth all is my enemy, and will not look upon me in peace. And with that came the cry, and I awoke and ran out to see whence came the cry, and found thee alone in the street. And as God liveth, such as was the man in my dream, such art thou in my waking sight.—Not the less must I ask thee again, I said, wherefore didst thou follow me ?—That I may comfort thee, she answered. And how thinkest thou to comfort one whom God hath forsaken ?—That cannot be, she said, seeing that in a vision of the night he sent thee unto me, and so now hath sent me unto thee. Therefore will I go with thee, and minister unto thee.—Bethink thee well what thou doest, I

said ; and before thou art fully resolved, sit thee down by me in this cave, that I may tell thee my tale. And straightway she sat down, and I told her all. And ere I had finished the sun had risen.—Then art thou now alone, said the maiden, and hast no one to love thee ?—No one, I answered, man, woman, or child.—Then will I go with thee, for I know neither father nor mother, and no one hath power over me, for I keep goats on the mountains for wages, and if thou wilt but give me bread to eat I will serve thee. And a great love arose in my heart to the maiden. And I left her in the cave, and went to the nearest city, and returned thence with garments and victuals. And I loved the maiden greatly. And although my age was then marvellous, being over and above a thousand and seven hundred years, yet found she my person neither pitiful nor uncomely, for I was still in body even such as when the Lord Jesus spake the word of my doom. And the damsel loved me, and was mine. And she was as the apple of mine eye. And the world was no more unto me as a desert, but it blossomed as the rose of Sharon. And although I knew every city upon it, and every highway and navigable sea, yet did all become to me fresh and new because of the joy which the damsel had in beholding its kingdoms and the glories thereof. . . . .

"'And it came to pass that my heart grew proud within me, and I said to myself that I was all-superior to other men, for Death could not touch me ; that I was a marvel upon the face of the world : and in this yet more above all men that had ever lived, that at such an age as mine I could yet gain the love, yea, the absolute devotion, of such an one as my wife, who never wearied of my company and conversation. So I took to me even the free grace of love as my merit unto pride, and laid it not to the great gift of God and the tenderness of the heart of my beloved. Like Satan in heaven, I was uplifted in the strength and worthiness and honour of my demon-self, and my pride went not forth in thanks, for I gloried not in my God, but in Ahasuerus. Then the thought smote me like an arrow of lightning : *She will*

die, and thou shalt live—live—live—and as he hath delayed, so will he yet delay his coming. And as Satan from the seventh heaven, I fell prone. . . . . Then my spirit began again to revive within me, and I said, Lo! I have yet many years of her love ere she dieth, and when she is gone, I shall yet have the memory of my beloved to be with me and cheer me and bear me up, for I may never again despise that which she hath loved as she hath loved me. And yet again a thought smote me, and it was as an arrow of the lightning, and its barb was the truth : But she will grow old, it said, and will wither before thy face, and be as the waning moon in the heavens. And my heart cried out in an agony. But my will sought to comfort my heart, and said, Cry not out, for in spite of old age as in spite of death, I will love her still. Then something began to writhe within me, and to hiss out words that gathered themselves unto this purpose: But she will grow unlovely, and wrinkled, and dark of hue, and the shape of her body will vanish, and her form be unformed, and her eyes will grow small and dim, and creep back into her head, and her hair will fall from her, and she shall be as the unsightly figure of Death with a skin drawn over his unseemly bones ; and the damsel of thy love, with the round limbs and the flying hair, and the clear eyes out of which looketh a soul clear as they, will be nowhere—nowhere, for evermore, for thou wilt not be able to believe that she it is who standeth before thee : how will it be with thee then? And what mercy is his who hath sent thee a growing loss in the company of this woman? Thereupon I arose in the strength of my agony and went forth. And I said nothing unto my wife, but strode to the foot of the great mountain, whose entrails were all aglow, and on whose sides grew the palm and the tree-bread and the nut of milk. And I climbed the mountain, nor once looked behind me, but climbed to the top. And there for one moment I stood in the stock-dullness of despair. And beneath me was the great fiery gulf, outstretched like a red lake skimmed over with black ice, through the cracks wherein shone the blinding fire. Every moment here and there a great liquid

bubbling would break through the crust, and made a wallowing heap upon the flat, then sink again leaving an open red well-pool of fire whence the rays shot up like flame, although flame there was none. It lay like the back of some huge animal upheaved out of hell, which was wounded and bled fire.—Now, in the last year of my long sojourn, life had again, because of the woman that loved me, become precious unto me, and more than once had I laughed as I caught myself starting back from some danger in a crowded street, for the thing was new to me, so utterly had the care of my life fallen into disuse with me. But now again in my misery I thought no more of danger, but went stalking and sliding down the cindery slope of the huge fire cup, and out upon the lake of molten earth—molten as when first it shot from the womb of the sun, of whose ardour, through all the millions of years, it had not yet cooled. And as once St. Peter on the stormy water to find the Lord of Life, so walked I on the still lake of fire caring neither for life nor death. For my heart was withered to the roots by the thought of the decay of her whom I had loved ; for would not then her very presence every hour be causing me to forget the beauty that had once made me glad?—I had walked some ten furlongs, and passed the middle of the lake, when suddenly I bethought me that she would marvel whither I had gone, and set out to seek me, and something might befall her, and I should lose my rose ere its leaves had begun to drop. And I turned and trode again in haste across the floor of black heat, broken and seamed with red light. And lo ! as I neared the midst of the lake, a form came towards me, walking in the very footsteps I had left behind me, nor had I to look again to know the gracious motion of my beloved. And the black ice broke at her foot, and the fire shone upon her face, and it was lovely as an angel of God, and the glow of her love outshone the glow of the nether fire. And I called not to stay her foot, for I judged that the sooner she was with me, the sooner would she be in safety, for I knew how to walk therein better than she. And my heart sang a song within

me in praise of the love of woman, but I thought only of the love of my woman to me, whom the fires of hell could not hold back from him who was worthy of her love; and my heart sent the song up to my lips; but, as the first word arose, sure itself a red bubble from the pit of glowing hell, the black crust burst up between us, and a great hillock of seething, slow-spouting, slow-falling, mad red fire arose. For a moment or two the molten mound bubbled and wallowed, then sank—and I saw not my wife. Headlong I plunged into the fiery pool at my feet, and the clinging torture hurt me not, and I caught her in my arms, and rose to the surface, and crept forth, and shook the fire from mine eyes, and lo! I held to my bosom but as the fragment of a cinder of the furnace. And I laughed aloud in my madness, and the devils below heard me, and laughed yet again. O Age! O Decay! I cried, see how I triumph over thee: what canst thou do to this? And I flung the cinder from me into the pool, and plunged again into the grinning fire. But it cast me out seven times, and the seventh time I turned from it, and rushed out of the valley of burning, and threw myself on the mountain-side in the moonlight, and awoke mad.

"'And what I had then said in despair, I said yet again in thankfulness. O Age! O Decay! I cried, what canst thou now do to destroy the image of her which I bear nested in my heart of hearts? That at least is safe, I thank God. And from that hour I nevermore believed that I should die when at length my body dropped from me. If the thought came, it came as a fear, and not as a thing concerning which a man may say *I would* or *I would not*. For a mighty hope had risen within me, that yet I should stand forgiven in the eyes of him that was crucified, and that in token of his forgiveness, he would grant me to look again, but in peace, upon the face of her that had loved me. O mighty Love, who can tell to what heights of perfection thou mayest yet rise in the bosom of the meanest who followeth the Crucified.'" . . . .

CHAPTER LXXX.

REMARKS.

HEN Polwarth closed the manuscript, and for a time no one spoke.

"The man who wrote that book," said Wingfold, "could not have been all out of his right mind."

"I must confess to you," returned Polwarth, "that I have chosen some of the more striking passages—only some of them, however. One thing is pretty clear—that, granted the imagined conditions, within that circle the writer is sane enough—as sane at least as the Wandering Jew himself could well have been."

"Could you trust me with the manuscript, Mr. Polwarth?" said the curate.

"Willingly."

"And I may carry it home with me?"

"Certainly."

"I shall take right good care of it. Are there any further memorials of struggle with unbelief?"

"Yes, there are some; for mood and not conviction must, in such a mind, often rule the hour. Sometimes he can believe; sometimes he cannot: he is a great man indeed who can always rise above his own moods! There is one passage I specially remember in which after his own fashion he treats of the existence of a God. You will know the one I mean when you come to it."

"It is indeed a treasure!" said the curate, taking the book and regarding it with prizing eyes. In his heart he was thinking of Leopold and Helen. And while he thus regarded the book, he was himself regarded of the gray luminous eyes of Rachel. What shone from those eyes may have been her delight at hearing him so speak of the book, for the hand that wrote it was that of her father; but there was a lingering in her gaze, not unmixed with questioning, and a certain indescribable liquidity in its light, reminding one of the stars as seen through a clear air from which the dew settles thick, that might have made a mother anxious. Alas for many a woman whose outward form is ungainly—she has a full round heart under the twisted ribs!

Why then should I say *alas?* Were it better that the heart were like the shape? or are such as Rachel forgotten before the God of the sparrows? No, surely; but even he who most distinctly believes that from before the face of God every sorrow shall vanish, that they that sow in tears shall reap in joy, that death is but a mist that for a season swathes the spirit, and that, ever as the self-seeking vanishes from love, it groweth more full of delight—even he who with all his heart believes this, may be mournful over the aching of another heart while yet it lasts; and he who looks for his own death as his resurrection, may yet be sorrowful at every pale sunset that reminds him of the departure of the beloved before him.

The curate rose and took his departure, but the light of the gaze that had rested upon him lingered yet on the countenance of Rachel, and a sad half-smile hung over the motions of the baby-like fingers that knitted so busily.

The draper followed the curate, and Polwarth went up to his own room: he never could keep off his knees for long together. And as soon as she was alone Rachel's hands dropped on her lap, her eyes closed, and her lips moved with solemn sweet motions. If there was a hearing ear open to that little house, oh surely those two were blessed! If not, then kind death was yet for a certainty drawing nigh—only what if in deep hell there should be yet a deeper hell? And

until slow Death arrive what loving heart can bear the load that stupid Chance or still more stupid Fate has heaped upon it? Yet had I rather be crushed beneath the weight of mine, and die with my friends in the moaning of eternal farewells, than live like George Bascombe to carry lightly his little bag of content. A cursed confusion indeed is the universe, if it be no creation but the helpless unhelpable thing such as men would have us believe it—the hotbed mother of the children of an iron Necessity. Can any damnation be worse than this damning into an existence from which there is no refuge but a doubtful death?

Drew overtook Wingfold, and they walked together into Glaston.

"Wasn't that splendid?" said the draper.

"Hath not God chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty?" returned the curate. "Even through the play of a madman's imagination the spirit of a sound mind may speak. Did you not find in it some stuff that would shape into answers to your questions?"

"I ought to have done so, I daresay," answered the draper, "but to tell the truth, I was so taken up with the wild story and the style of the thing, and the little man's way of reading it, that I never thought of what I was full of when I came."

They parted at the shop, and the curate went on.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

STRUGGLES.

HE stopped at the Manor House, for it was only beginning to be late, to inquire after Leopold. Helen received him with her usual coldness—a manner which was in part assumed for self-protection, for in his presence she always felt rebuked, and which had the effect of a veil between them to hide from her much of the curate's character that might otherwise have been intelligible to her. Leopold, she said, was a little better, but Wingfold walked home thinking what a happy thing it would be if God were to take him away indeed.

His interest in Helen deepened and deepened. He could not help admiring her strength of character even when he saw it spent for worse than nought ; and her devotion to her brother was lovely, notwithstanding the stains of selfishness that spotted it. Her moral standard was far from lofty, and as to her spiritual nature, that as yet appeared nowhere. And yet the growth in her was marvellous when he thought of what she had seemed before this trouble came. One evening as he left Leopold, he heard her singing and stood on the stair to listen. And to listen was to marvel. For her voice, instead of being hard and dry, as when he heard it before, was, without any loss of elasticity, now liquid and mellifluous, and full of feeling. Its tones were borne along

like the leaves on the wild west wind of Shelley's sonnet. And the longing of the curate to help her from that moment took a fresh departure, and grew and grew. But as the hours and days and weeks passed, and the longing found no outlet, it turned to an almost hopeless brooding upon the face and the form, yea the heart and soul of the woman he so fain would help, until ere long he loved her with the passion of a man mingled with the compassion of a prophet. He saw that something had to be done *in* her—perhaps that some saving shock in the guise of ruin had to visit her; that some door had to burst open, some roof blown away, some rock blasted, that light and air might have free course through her soul's house, without which that soul could never grow stately like the house it inhabited. Whatever might be destined to effect this, for the chance of rendering poorest and most servile aid, he would watch and did watch, in silence, and self-restraint, lest he should be betrayed into any presumptuous word that might breathe frost instead of balm upon the buds of her delaying spring. If he might but be allowed to minister when at length the sleeping soul should stir! If its waking glance—ah! if it might fall on him! As often as the thought intruded, his heart would give one delirious bound, then couch ashamed of its presumption. He would not, he dared not look in that direction. He accused himself of mingling earthly motives and feelings with the unselfish and true, and scorned himself because of it. And was not Bascombe already the favoured friend of her heart? Yet how could it be of her heart? for what concern had hearts in a common unbelief? None; but there were hearts—the man and the woman—notwithstanding, who might yet well be drawn together by the unknown divine which they also shared; and that Helen, whose foot seemed now to approach and now to shun the line betwixt the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of heaven, should retire with such a guide into the desert of denial and chosen godlessness, was to Wingfold a thought of torture almost unendurable. The thought of its possibility, nay, probability—for were not such unfitnesses continually

becoming facts?—threatened sometimes to upset the whole fabric of his faith, although reared in spite of theology, adverse philosophy, and the most honest and bewildering doubt. That such a thing should be possible seemed at those times to bear more against the existence of a God, than all the other grounds of question together. Then a shudder would go to the very deeps of his heart, and he would lay himself silent before the presence for a time ; or make haste into the solitudes—not where the sun shone and the water ran, but where the light was dim and the wind low in the pine woods. There, where the sombre green vaults were upheld by a hundred slender columns, and the far-receding aisles seemed to lead to the ancestral home of shadows, there, his own soul a shadow of grief and fear among the shades of the gloomy temple, he bowed his heart before the Eternal, gathered together all the might of his being, and groaned forth in deepest effort of a will that struggled to be : "Thy will be done, and not mine." Then would his spirit again walk erect, and carry its burden as a cross and not as a gravestone.

Sometimes he was sorely perplexed to think how the weakness, as he called it, had begun, and how it had grown upon him. He could not say it was his doing, and what had he ever been aware of in it against which he ought to have striven? Came not the whole thing of his nature, a nature that was not of his design, and was beyond him and his control—a nature that either sprung from a God, or grew out of an unconscious Fate? If from the latter, how was such as he to encounter and reduce to a constrained and self-rejecting reason a Self unreasonble, being an issue of the Unreasoning, which Self was yet greater than he, its vagaries the source of his intensest consciousness and brightest glimpses of the ideal and all-desirable. If on the other hand it was born of a God, then let that God look to it, for, sure, that which belonged to his nature could not be evil or of small account in the eyes of him who made him in his own image. But alas ! that image had, no matter how, been so defaced, that the will of the man might even now be setting

itself up against the will of the God! Did his love then spring from the God-will or the man-will? Must there not be some God-way of the thing, all right and nothing wrong? —but he could not compass it, and the marvel to himself was that all the time he was able to go on preaching, and that with some sense of honesty and joy in his work.

In this trouble more than ever Wingfold felt that if there was no God, his soul was but a thing of rags and patches out in the masterless pitiless storm and hail of a chaotic universe. Often would he rush into the dark, as it were, crying for God, and ever he would emerge therefrom with some tincture of the light, enough to keep him alive and send him to his work. And there in her own seat, Sunday after Sunday, sat the woman whom he had seen ten times, and that for no hasty moments, during the week, by the bedside of her brother, yet to whom only now, in the open secrecy of the pulpit, did he dare utter the words of might he would so fain have poured direct into her suffering heart. And there, Sunday after Sunday, the face he loved bore witness to the trouble of the heart he loved yet more: that heart was not yet redeemed! oh, might it be granted him to set some little wind a blowing for its revival and hope! As often as he stood up to preach, his heart swelled with the message he bore—a message of no private interpretation, but for the healing of the nations, yet a message for her, and for the healing of every individual heart that would hear and take, and he spoke with the freedom and dignity of a prophet. But when he saw her afterwards he scarcely dared let his eyes rest a moment on her face, would only pluck the flower of a glance flying, or steal it at such moments when he thought she would not see. She caught his glance however far oftener than he knew, and was sometimes aware of it without seeing it at all. And there was that in the curate's behaviour, in his absolute avoidance of self-assertion, or the least possible intrusion upon her mental privacy—in the wrapping of his garments around him, as it were, that his presence might offend as little as might be, while at the same time he was full of simple direct ministration to her

brother, without one side-glance that sought approval of her, which the nobility of the woman could not fail to note, and seek to understand.

It was altogether a time of great struggle with Wingfold. He seemed to be assailed in every direction, and to feel the strong house of life giving way in every part, and yet he held on—lived, which he thought was all, and, without knowing it, grew. Perhaps it may be to this period that the following verses which I found among his papers belong: he could not himself tell me.—

Out of my door I run to do the thing
That calls upon me. Straight the wind of words
Whoops from mine ears the sounds of them that sing
About their work—My God! my Father-King.

I turn in haste to see thy blessed door,
But lo! a cloud of flies and bats and birds,
And stalking vapours, and vague monster herds
Have risen and lighted, rushed and swollen between

Ah me! the house of peace is there no more.
Was it a dream then? Walls, fireside, and floor,
And sweet obedience, loving calm, and free,
Are vanished—gone as they had never been.

I labour groaning. Comes a sudden sheen!—
And I am kneeling at my Father's knee,
Sighing with joy, and hoping utterly.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE LAWN.

LEOPOLD had begun to cough, and the fever continued. Every afternoon came the red flush to his cheek, and the hard glitter into his eye. His talk was then excited, and mostly about his coming trial. To Helen it was terribly painful and she confessed to herself that but for Wingfold she must have given way. Leopold insisted on seeing Mr. Hooker every time he called, and every time expressed the hope that he would not allow pity for his weak state to prevent him from applying the severe remedy of the law to his moral condition. But in truth it began to look doubtful whether disease would not run a race with law for his life, even if the latter should at once proceed to justify a claim. From the first, Faber doubted if he would ever recover from the consequences of that exposure in the churchyard, and it soon became evident that his lungs were more than affected. His cough increased and he began to lose what little flesh he had.

One day Faber expressed his conviction to Wingfold that he was fighting the disease at the great disadvantage of having an unknown enemy to contend with.

"The fellow is unhappy," he said, "and if that lasts another month I shall throw up the sponge. He has a good deal of vitality, but it is yielding, and by that time he will be in a galloping consumption."

"You must do your best for him," said Wingfold, but in his heart he wished, with an honest affection, that he might not succeed.

Leopold, however, seemed to have no idea of his condition, and the curate wondered what he would think or do were he to learn that he was dying. Would he insist on completing his confession, and urging on a trial? He had himself told him all that had passed with the magistrate, and how things now were as he understood them, but it was plain that he had begun to be uneasy about the affair, and was doubtful at times whether all was as it seemed. The curate was not deceived. He had been present during a visit from Mr. Hooker, and nothing could be plainer than the impression out of which the good man spoke. Nor could he fail to suspect the cunning kindness of George Bascombe in the affair. But he did not judge that he had now the least call to interfere. The poor boy had done as much as lay either in or out of him in the direction of duty, and was daily becoming more and more unfit either to originate or carry out a further course of action. If he was in himself capable of anything more, he was, in his present state of weakness, utterly unable to cope with the will of those around him.

Faber would have had him leave the country for some southern climate, but he would not hear of it; and Helen, knowing to what extremities it might drive him, would not insist. Nor, indeed, was he now in a condition to be moved. Also the weather had grown colder, and he was sensitive to atmospheric changes as any creature of the elements.

But after a fortnight, when it was now the middle of the autumn, it grew quite warm again, and he revived and made such progress that he was able to be carried into the garden every day. He sat in a chair on the lawn, with his feet on a sheepskin, and a fur cloak about him. And for all the pain at his heart, for all the misery in which no one could share, for all the pangs of a helpless jealousy, checked only by a gnawing remorse, both of which took refuge in the thought of following through the spheres until he found her, cast him-

self at her feet, spoke the truth, and became, if he might, her slave for ever, failing which he could but turn and go wandering through the spheres, seeking rest and finding none, save indeed there were some salvation even for him in the bosom of his God—I say that, somehow, with all this on the brain and in the heart of him, the sunshine was yet pleasant in his eyes, while it stung him to the soul; the soft breathing of the wind was pleasant to his cheek, while he cursed himself for the pleasure it gave him; the few flowers that were left looked up at him mournfully, and he let them look, nor turned his eyes away, but let the tears gather and flow. The first agonies of the encounter of life and death were over and life was slowly wasting away. Oh what might not a little joy do for him! But where was the joy to be found that could irradiate such a darkness, even for one fair memorial moment?

One hot noon Wingfold lay beside him on the grass. Neither had spoken for some time: the curate more and more shrunk from speech to which his heart was not directly moved. As to what might be in season or out of season, he never would pretend to judge, he said, but even Balaam's ass knew when he had a call to speak. He plucked a pale-red pimpernell and handed it up over his head to Leopold. The youth looked at it for a moment and burst into tears. The curate rose hastily.

"It is so heartless of me," said Leopold, "to take pleasure in such a childish innocence as this!"

"It merely shows," said the curate, laying his hand gently on his shoulder, "that even in these lowly lovelinesses, there is a something that has its root deeper than your pain; that all about us, in earth and air, wherever eye or ear can reach there is a power ever breathing itself forth in signs, now in a daisy, now in a wind-waft, a cloud, a sunset; a power that holds constant and sweetest relation with the dark and silent world within us; that the same God who is in us, and upon whose tree we are the buds, if not yet the flowers, also is all about us—inside, the Spirit; outside, the Word. And the two are ever trying to meet in us; and when they meet,

then the sign without, and the longing within, become one in light, and the man no more walketh in darkness, but knoweth whither he goeth."

As he ended thus, the curate bent over and looked at Leopold. But the poor boy had not listened to a word he said. Something in his tone had soothed him, but the moment he ceased, the vein of his grief burst out bleeding afresh. He clasped his thin hands together, and looked up in an agony of hopeless appeal to the blue sky, now grown paler as in fear of the coming cold, though still the air was warm and sweet, and cried,

"Oh! if God would be good and unmake me, and let the darkness cover the place where once was me! That would be like a good God! All I should be sorry for then would be, that there was not enough of me left for a dim flitting Will-o'-the-wisp of praise, ever singing my thankfulness to him that I was no more.—Yet even then my deed would remain, for I dare not ask that she should die outright also—that would be to heap wrong upon wrong. What an awful thing being is! Not even my annihilation could make up for my crime, or rid it out of the universe."

"True, Leopold!" said the curate. "Nothing but the burning love of God can rid sin out of anywhere. But are you not forgetting him who surely knew what he undertook when he would save the world? No more than you could have set that sun flaming overhead, with its million-miled billows and its limitless tempest of fire, can you tell what the love of God is, or what it can do for you, if only by enlarging your love with the inrush of itself. Few men have such a cry to raise to the Father as you, such a claim of sin and helplessness to heave up before him, such a joy even to offer to the great Shepherd who cannot rest while one sheep strays from his flock, one prodigal haunts the dens of evil and waste. Cry to him, Leopold, my dear boy. Cry to him again and yet again, for he himself said that men ought always to pray and not to faint, for God did hear and would answer although he might seem long about it. I think we shall find one day that nobody, not the poet of widest sweep and most daring

imagination, not the prophet who soars the highest in his ardour to justify the ways of God to men, not the child when he is most fully possessed of the angel that in heaven always beholds the face of the Father of Jesus, has come or could have come within sight of the majesty of his bestowing upon his children. For did he not, if the story be true, allow torture itself to invade the very soul's citadel of his best beloved, as he went to seek the poor ape of a prodigal, stupidly grinning amongst his harlots?"

Leopold did not answer, and the shadow lay deep on his face for a while; but at length it began to thin, and at last a feeble quivering smile broke through the cloud, and he wept soft tears of refreshing.

It was not that the youth had turned again from the hope of rest in the Son of Man; but that, as every one knows who knows anything of the human spirit, there must be in its history days and seasons, mornings and nights, yea deepest midnights. It has its alternating summer and winter, its storm and shine, its soft dews and its tempests of lashing hail, its cold moons and prophetic stars, its pale twilights of saddest memory, and its golden gleam of brightest hope. All these mingled and displaced each other in Leopold's ruined world, where chaos had come again, but over whose waters a mightier breath was now moving.

And now after much thought, the curate saw that he could not hope to transplant into the bosom of the lad the flowers of truth that gladdened his own garden; he must sow the seed from which they had sprung, and that seed was the knowledge of the true Jesus. It was now the more possible to help him in this way, that the wild beast of his despair had taken its claws from his bosom, had withdrawn a pace or two, and couched watching. And Wingfold soon found that nothing calmed and brightened him like talk about Jesus. He had tried verse first—seeking out the best within his reach wherein loving souls have uttered their devotion to the man of men; but here also the flowers would not be transplanted. How it came about he hardly knew, but he had soon drifted into rather than chosen another way, which way proved a

right one; he would begin thinking aloud on some part of the gospel story, generally that which was most in his mind at the time—talking with himself, as it were, all about it. He began this one morning as he lay on the grass beside him, and that was the position in which he found he could best soliloquize. Now and then, but not often, Leopold would interrupt him, and perhaps turn the monologue into dialogue, but even then Wingfold would hardly ever look at him: he would not disturb him with more of his presence than he could help, or allow the truth to be flavoured with more of his individuality than was unavoidable. For every individuality, he argued, has a peculiar flavour to every other, and only Jesus is the pure simple humanity that every one can love, out and out, at once. In these mental meanderings, he avoided nothing, took notice of every difficulty, whether able to discuss it fully or not, broke out in words of delight when his spirit was moved, nor hid his disappointment when he failed in getting at what might seem good enough to be the heart of the thing. It was like hatching a sermon in the sun instead of in the oven. Occasionally, when, having ceased, he looked up to know how his pupil fared, he found him fast asleep—sometimes with a smile, sometimes with a tear on his face. The sight would satisfy him well. Calm upon such a tormented sea must be the gift of God; and the curate would then sometimes fall asleep himself—to start awake at the first far-off sound of Helen's dress as it swept a running fire of fairy fog-signals from the half-opened buds of the daisies, and the long heads of the rib grass, when he would rise and saunter a few paces aside, and she would bend over her brother, to see if he were warm and comfortable. By this time all the old tenderness of her ministration had returned, nor did she seem any longer jealous of Wingfold's.

One day she came behind them as they talked. The grass had been mown that morning, and also she happened to be dressed in her riding habit and had gathered up the skirt over her arm, so that on this occasion she had made no sound of sweet approach. Wingfold had been uttering one

of his rambling monologues—in which was much without form, but nothing void.

"I don't know quite," he had been saying, "what to think about that story of the woman they brought to Jesus in the temple—I mean how it got into that nook of the gospel of St. John, where it has no right place.—They didn't bring her for healing or for the rebuke of her demon, but for condemnation, only they came to the wrong man for that. They dared not carry out the law of stoning, as they would have liked, I suppose, even if Jesus had condemned her, but perhaps they hoped rather to entrap him who was the friend of sinners into saying something against the law.—But what I want is, to know how it got there—just there, I mean betwixt the seventh and eighth chapters of St. John's Gospel. There is no doubt of its being an interpolation—that the twelfth verse, I think it is, ought to join on to the fifty-second. The Alexandrian manuscript is the only one of the three oldest that has it, and it is the latest of the three. I did think once, but hastily, that it was our Lord's text for saying *I am the light of the world*, but it follows quite as well on his offer of living water. One can easily see how the place would appear a very suitable one to any presumptuous scribe who wished to settle the question of where it should stand.—I wonder if St. John told the lovely tale as something he had forgotten after he had finished dictating all the rest. Or was it well known to all the evangelists, only no one of them was yet partaker enough of the spirit of him who was the friend of sinners, to dare put it on written record, thinking it hardly a safe story to expose to the quarrying of men's conclusions. But it doesn't matter much: the tale must be a true one. Only—to think of just this one story, of tenderest righteousness, floating about like a holy waif through the world of letters!—a sweet gray dove of promise that can find no rest for the sole of its foot! Just this one story of all stories a kind of outcast! and yet as a wanderer, oh how welcome! Some manuscripts, I understand, have granted it a sort of outhouse-shelter at the end of the gospel of St. Luke. But it all matters nothing, so long as we can believe

it ; and true it must be, it is so like him all through. And if it does go wandering as a stray through the gospels without place of its own, what matters it so long as it can find hearts enough to nestle in, and bring forth its young of comfort !—Perhaps the woman herself told it, and, as with the woman of Samaria, some would and some would not believe her.—Oh ! the eyes that met upon her ! The fiery hail of scorn from those of the Pharisees—the light of eternal sunshine from those of Jesus !—I was reading the other day, in one of the old Miracle Plays, how each that looked on while Jesus wrote with his finger on the ground, imagined he was writing down his individual sins, and was in terror lest his neighbour should come to know them.—And wasn't he gentle even with those to whom he was sharper than a two-edged sword ! and oh how gentle to her he would cover from their rudeness and wrong ! *Let the sinless throw!* And the sinners went out, and she followed—to sin no more. No reproaches, you see ! No stirring up of the fiery snakes ! Only don't do it again.—I don't think she did it again :—do you ?"

It was just here that Helen came and stood behind Leopold's chair. The curate lay on the grass, and neither saw her.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

HOW JESUS SPOKE TO WOMEN.

"BUT why wasn't he as gentle with good women?" said Leopold.

"Wasn't he?" said the curate in some surprise.

"He said *What have I to do with thee?* to his own mother."

"A Greek scholar should go to the Greek," said the curate. "Our English is not perfect. You see she wanted to make him show off, and he thought how little she knew what he came to the world for. Her thoughts were so unlike his that he said, What have we in common! It was a moan of the Godhead over the distance of its creature. Perhaps he thought: How then will you stand the shock when at length it comes? But he looked at her as her own son ought to look at every blessed mother, and she read in his eyes no rebuke, for instantly, sure of her desire, she told them to do whatever he said."

"I hope that's the right way of it," said Leopold, "for I want to trust him out and out. But what do you make of the story of the poor woman that came about her daughter? Wasn't he rough to her. It always seemed to me such a cruel thing to talk of throwing the meat of the children to the dogs!"

"We cannot judge of the word until we know the spirit

that gave birth to it. Let me ask you a question: What would you take for the greatest proof of downright friendship a man could show you?"

"That is too hard a question to answer all at once."

"Well, I may be wrong, but the deepest outcome of friendship seems to me, on the part of the superior at least, the permission, or better still, the call, to share in his sufferings. And in saying that hard word to the poor Gentile, our Lord honoured her thus mightily. He assumed for the moment the part of the Jew towards the Gentile, that he might, for the sake of all the world of Gentiles and Jews, lay bare to his Jewish followers the manner of spirit they were of, and let them see what a lovely humanity they despised in their pride of election. He took her to suffer with him for the salvation of the world. The cloud overshadowed them both, but what words immediately thereafter made a glory in her heart! He spoke to her as if her very faith had reached an arm into the heavens, and brought therefrom the thing she sought. But I confess," the curate went on, "those two passages have both troubled me. So I presume will everything that is God's, until it becomes a strength and a light by revealing its true nature to the heart that has grown capable of understanding it. The first sign of the coming capacity and the coming joy, is the anxiety and the question. —There is another passage, which, although it does not trouble me so much, I cannot yet get a right perception of. When Mary Magdalene took the Master of Death for the gardener—the gardener of the garden of the tombs! no great mistake, was it?—it is a lovely thing that mistaking of Jesus for the gardener!—how the holy and the lowly, yea the holy and the common meet on all sides! Just listen to their morning talk—the morning of the eternal open world to Jesus while the shadows of this narrow life still clustered around Mary:—I can give it you exactly, for I was reading it this very day.

"'Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?'

"'Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.'

"'Mary.'

"'Master!'

"'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God.'

"Why did he say, *Do not touch me?* It could not be that there was any defilement to one in the new body of the resurrection, from contact with one still in the old garments of humanity. But could it be that there was danger to her in the contact? Was there something in the new house from heaven hurtful to the old tabernacle? I can hardly believe it. Perhaps it might be. But we must look at the reason the Master gives—only of all words hard to understand, the little conjunctions are sometimes the hardest. What can that *for* mean? 'Touch me not, *for* I am not yet ascended to my Father.' Does it mean, 'I must first present myself to my Father; I must first have his hand laid on this body new risen from the grave; I must go home first?' The child must kiss his mother first, then his sisters and brothers: was it so with Jesus? Was he so glad in his father, that he must carry even the human body he had rescued eternal from the grave, home to show him first? There are many difficulties about the interpretation, and even if true, it would still shock every heart whose devotion was less than absolutely child-like. Was not God *with* him, as close to him as even God could come to his eternal son—in him—*one* with him, all the time? How could he get nearer to him by going to heaven? What headquarters, what court of place and circumstance should the Eternal, Immortal, Invisible hold? And yet if from him flow time and space, although he cannot be subject to them; if his son could incarnate himself—cast the living, responsive, elastic, flowing, evanishing circumstance of a human garment around him; if, as Novalis says, God can become whatever he can create, then may there not be some central home of God, holding relation even to time and space and sense? But I am bewildered about it.—Jesus stood then

in the meeting point of both worlds, or rather in the skirts of the great world that infolds the less. I am talking like a baby, for my words cannot compass or even represent my thoughts. This world looks to us the natural and simple one, and so it is—absolutely fitted to our need and education. But there is that in us which is not at home in this world, which I believe holds secret relations with every star or perhaps rather with that in the heart of God whence issued every star, diverse in kind and character as in colour and place and motion and light. To that in us this world is so far strange and unnatural and unfitting, and we need a yet homelier home. Yea, no home at last will do but the home of God's heart. Jesus, I say, was now looking, on one side, into the region of a deeper life, where his people, those that knew their own when they saw him, would one day find themselves tenfold at home ; while, on the other hand, he was looking into the region of their present life, which custom and faithlessness makes them afraid to leave. But we need not fear what the new conditions of life will bring, either for body or heart, they will be nearer and sweeter to our deeper being as Jesus is nearer and dearer than any man because he is more human than any. He is all that we can love or look for, and at the root of that very loving and looking.—'In my Father's house are many mansions,' he said. Matter, time, space, are all God's, and whatever may become of our philosophies, whatever he does with or in respect of time, place, and what we call matter, his doing must be true in philosophy as well as fact. But I am wandering."

The curate *was* wandering, but the liberty of wandering was essential to his talking with the kind of freedom and truth he wanted to mediate betwixt his pupil and the lovely things he saw.

"I wonder where the penitent thief was all the time," said Leopold.

"Yes, that also is a difficulty. There again come in the bothering time and space, bothering in their relation to heavenly things, I mean. On the Friday, the penitent thief,

as you call him, was to be with Jesus in Paradise; and now it was Sunday, and Jesus said he had not yet been up to see his Father. Some would say, I am too literal, too curious; what can Friday and Sunday have to do with Paradise? But words *mean* in both worlds, for they are not two but one—surely at least when Jesus thinks and speaks of them; and there can be no wrong in feeling ever so blindly and dully after *what* they mean. Such humble questioning can do no harm, even if, in the face of the facts, the questions be as far off and *silly*—in the old sweet meaning of the word—as those of any infant concerning a world he has not proved.—But about Mary Magdalene: He must have said the word *Touch me not.* That could not have crept in. It is too hard for an interpolation, I think; and if no interpolation, it must mean some deep good thing we don't understand. One thing we can make sure of: it was nothing that should hurt her; for see what follows. But for that, when he said *Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father*, she might have thought—'Ah! thou hast thy Father to go to and thou will leave us for him.' —*But* he went on, *go to my brethren and say unto them: I ascend unto my Father*, AND YOUR FATHER; AND MY GOD AND YOUR GOD. What more could she want? Think: the Father of Jesus, with whom, in all his knowledge and all his suffering, the grand heart was perfectly, exultingly satisfied, that Father he calls our Father too. He shares with his brethren—of his best, his deepest, his heartiest, most secret delight, and makes it their and his most open joy; he shares his eternal Father with us, his perfect God with his brethren. And whatever his not having ascended to him may mean, we see, with marvel and joy, that what delayed him—even though, for some reason perfect in tenderness as in truth, he would not be touched—was love to Mary Magdalene and his mother and his brethren. He could not go to the Father without comforting them first. And certainly whatever she took the *Touch me not* to mean or point at, it was nothing that hurt her.—It just strikes me—is it possible he said it in order to turn the overwhelming passion of her joy, which

after such a restoration would have clung more than ever to the visible presence, and would be ready to suffer the pains of death yet again when he parted from her—might it be to turn that torrent into the wider and ever widening channel of joy in his everlasting presence to the innermost being, his communion, heart to heart, with every child of his Father? In our poor weakness and narrowness and self-love, even of Jesus the bodily may block out the spiritual nearness, which, however in most moods we may be unable to realise the fact, is and remains a thing unutterably lovelier and better and dearer—enhancing tenfold what vision of a bodily presence may at some time be granted us. But how any woman can help casting herself heart and soul at the feet of such a lowly grandeur, such a tender majesty, such a self-dissolving perfection—I cannot imagine. The truth must be that those who kneel not have not seen. You do not once read of a woman being against him—except indeed it was his own mother, when she thought he was going all astray and forgetting his high mission. The divine love in him towards his Father in heaven and his brethren of men, was ever melting down his conscious individuality in sweetest showers upon individual hearts; he came down like rain upon the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. No woman, no man surely ever saw him as he was and did not worship!"

Helen turned and glided back into the house, and neither knew she had been there.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

DELIVERANCE.

ALL that could be done for Leopold by tenderest sisterly care under the supervision of Mr. Faber, who believed in medicine less than in good nursing, was well supplemented by the brotherly ministrations of Wingfold, who gave all the time he could honestly spare from his ordinary work to soothe and enlighten the suffering youth. But it became clearer every week that nothing would avail to entice the torn roots of his being to clasp again the soil of the world: he was withering away out of it. Ere long symptoms appeared which no one could well mistake, and Lingard himself knew that he was dying. Wingfold had dreaded that his discovery of the fact might reveal that he had imagined some atonement in the public confession he desired to make, and that, when he found it denied him, he would fall back into despair. But he was with him at the moment, and his bearing left no ground for anxiety. A gleam of gladness from below the horizon of his spirit, shot up, like the aurora of a heavenly morning, over the sky of his countenance. He glanced at his friend, smiled, and said,

"It has killed me too, and that is a comfort."

The curate only looked his reply.

"They say," resumed Leopold, after a while, "that God takes the will for the deed:—do you think so?"

"Certainly, if it be a true genuine will."

"I am sure I meant to give myself up," said Leopold. "I had not the slightest idea that they were fooling me. I know it now, but what can I do? I am so weak, I should only die on the way."

He tried to rise, but fell back in the chair.

"Oh!" he sighed, "isn't it good of God to let me die! Who knows what he may do for me on the other side! Who can tell what the bounty of a God like Jesus may be!"

A vision rose before the mind's eye of the curate:—Emmeline kneeling for Leopold's forgiveness; but he wisely held his peace. The comfort of the sinner must come from the forgiveness of God, not from the favourable judgment of man mitigating the harshness of his judgment of himself. Wingfold's business was to start him well in the world whither he was going. He must fill his scrip with the only wealth that would not dissolve in the waters of the river—that was, the knowledge of Jesus.

It shot a terrible pang to the heart of Helen, herself, for all her suffering, so full of life, when she learned that her darling must die. Yet was there no small consolation mingled with the shock. Fear vanished, and love returned with grief in twofold strength. She flew to him, and she who had been so self-contained, so composed, so unsubmissive to any sway of feeling, broke into such a storm of passionate affection, that the *vexilla mortis* answered from his bosom flaunting themselves in crimson before her eyes. In vain, for Leopold's sake, the curate had sought to quiet her: she had resented his interference; but this result of her impetuosity speedily brought her to her senses, and set her to subdue herself.

The same evening Leopold insisted on dictating to the curate his confession, which done, he signed it, making him and Helen attest the signature. This document Wingfold took charge of, promising to make the right use of it, whatever he should on reflection conclude that to be; after which Leopold's mind seemed at ease.

His sufferings from cough and weakness and fever now

augmented with greater rapidity, but it was plain from the kind of light in his eye, and the far-look which was yet not retrospective, that hope and expectation were high in him. He had his times of gloom, when the dragon of the past crept out of its cave, and tore him afresh ; but the prospect of coming deliverance strengthened him.

"Do you really think," he said once to the curate, "that I shall ever see Emmeline again?"

"Truly I hope so," answered his friend, "and could argue upon the point. But I think the best way, when doubt comes as to anything you would like to be true, is just to hide yourself in God, as the child would hide from the dark in the folds of his mother's mantle."

"But aunt would say, if she knew, that, dying as she did, Emmeline could not be saved."

"Some people may have to be a good deal astonished as to what can and cannot be," returned the curate. "But never mind what people say: make your appeal to the Saviour of men about whatever troubles you. Cry to the faithful creator, his Father. To be a faithful creator needs a might of truth and loving kindness of which our narrow hearts can ill conceive. Ask much of God, my boy, and be very humble and very hoping."

After all such utterances, Leopold would look his thanks, and hold his peace.

"I wish it was over," he said once.

"So do I," returned the curate. "But be of good courage. I think nothing will be given you to bear that you will not be able to bear."

"I can bear a great deal more than I have had yet. I don't think I shall ever complain. That would be to take myself out of his hands, and I have no hope anywhere else.—Are you any surer about him, sir, than you used to be?"

"At least I hope in him far more," answered Wingfold.

"Is that enough?"

"No, I want more."

"I wish I could come back and tell you that I am alive and all is true."

"I would rather have the natural way of it, and get the good of not knowing first."

"But if I could tell you I had found God then that would make you sure."

Wingfold could not help a smile :—as if any assurance from such a simple soul could reach the questions that tossed his troubled spirit !

"I think I shall find all I want in Jesus Christ," he said.

"But you can't see him, you know."

"Perhaps I can do better. And at all events I can wait," said the curate. "Even if he would let me, I would not see him one moment before he thought it best. I would not be out of a doubt or difficulty an hour sooner than he would take me."

Leopold gazed at him and said no more.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE MEADOW.

AS the disease advanced, his desire for fresh air and freedom grew to a great longing. One hot day, whose ardours, too strong for the leaves whose springs had begun to dry up, were burning them "yellow and black and pale and hectic red," the fancy seized him to get out of the garden with its clipt box-trees and cypresses, into the meadow beyond. There a red cow was switching her tail as she gathered her milk from the world, and looking as if all were well. He liked the look of the cow, and the open meadow, and wanted to share it with her he said. Helen, with the anxiety of a careful nurse, feared it might hurt him.

"What *does* it matter?" he returned. "Is life so sweet that every moment more of it is a precious boon? After I'm gone a few days, you won't know a week from an hour of me. What a weight it will be off you! I envy you all the relief of it. It will be to you just what it would be to me to get into that meadow."

Helen made haste to let him have his will. They prepared a sort of litter, and the curate and the coachman carried him. Hearing what they were about, Mrs. Ramshorn hurried into the garden to protest, but protested in vain, and joined the little procession, walking with Helen, like a second mourner, after the bier. They crossed the lawn, and

through a double row of small cypresses went winding down to the underground passage, as if to the tomb itself. They had not thought of opening the door first, and the place was dark and sepulchral. Helen hastened to set it wide.

"Lay me down for a moment," said Leopold. "—Here I lie in my tomb! How soft and brown the light is! I should not mind lying here, half-asleep, half-awake, for centuries, if only I had the hope of a right good waking at last."

A flood of fair light flashed in sweet torrent into the place—and there, framed in the doorway, but far across the green field, stood the red cow, switching her tail.

"And here comes my resurrection!" cried Leopold. "I have not had long to wait for it—have I?"

He smiled a pained content as he spoke, and they bore him out into the sun and air. They set him down in the middle of the field in a low chair—not far from a small clump of trees, through which the footpath led to the stile whereon the curate was seated when first he saw the Polwarths. Mrs. Ramshorn found the fancy of the sick man pleasant for the hale, and sent for her knitting. Helen sat down empty-handed on the wool at her brother's feet, and Wingfold, taking a book from his pocket, withdrew to the trees.

He had not read long, sitting within sight and call of the group, when Helen came to him.

"He seems inclined to go to sleep," she said. "Perhaps if you would read something, it would send him off."

"I will with pleasure," he said, and returning with her, sat down on the grass.

"May I read you a few verses I came upon the other day, Leopold?" he asked.

"Please do," answered the invalid, rather sleepily.

I will not pledge myself that the verses belonged to the book Wingfold held before him, but here they are. He read them slowly, and as evenly and softly and rhythmically as he could.

They come to thee, the halt, the maimed, the blind,
The devil-torn, the sick, the sore ;
Thy heart their well of life they find,
Thine ear their open door.

Ah ! who can tell the joy in Palestine—
What smiles and tears of rescued throngs !
Their lees of life were turned to wine,
Their prayers to shouts and songs !

The story dear our wise men fable call,
Give paltry facts the mighty range ;
To me it seems just what should fall,
And nothing very strange.

But were I deaf and lame and blind and sore,
I scarce would care for cure to ask ;
Another prayer should haunt thy door—
Set thee a harder task.

If thou art Christ, see here this heart of mine,
Torn, empty, moaning, and unblest !
Had ever heart more need of thine,
If thine indeed hath rest ?

Thy word, thy hand right soon did scare the bane
That in their bodies death did breed ;
If thou canst cure my deeper pain,
Then art thou Lord indeed.

Leopold smiled sleepily as Wingfold read, and ere the reading was over, slept.

"What can the little object want here?" said Mrs. Ramshorn.

Wingfold looked up and seeing who it was approaching them, said,

"Oh ! that is Mr. Polwarth, who keeps the park-gate."

"Nobody can well mistake him," returned Mrs. Ramshorn. "Everybody knows the creature."

"Few people know him really," said Wingfold.

"I *have* heard that he is an oddity in mind as well as in body," said Mrs. Ramshorn.

"He is a friend of mine," rejoined the curate. "I will go and meet him. He wants to know how Leopold is."

"Pray keep your seat, Mr. Wingfold. I don't in the least mind him," said Mrs. Ramshorn. "Any *friend* of

yours, as you are kind enough to call him, will be welcome. Clergymen come to know—indeed it is their duty to be acquainted with all sorts of people. The late Dean of Halystone would stop and speak to a pauper."

The curate did however go and meet Polwarth, and returning with him presented him to Mrs. Ramshorn, who received him with perfect condescension, and a most gracious bow. Helen bent her head also, very differently, but it would be hard to say how. The little man turned from them, and for a moment stood looking on the face of the sleeping youth: he had not seen him since Helen ordered him to leave the house. Even now she looked angry at his presumption in staring at her brother. But Polwarth did not see her look. A great tenderness came over his face, and his lips moved softly. "The lord of thy life keep it for thee, my son!" he murmured, gazed a moment longer, then rejoined Wingfold. They walked aside a few paces and seated themselves on the grass.

"Pray be seated," said Mrs. Ramshorn, without looking up from her knitting—the seat she offered being the wide meadow.

But they had already done so, and presently were deep in a gentle talk, of which at length certain words that had been foolhardy enough to wander within her range, attracted the notice of Mrs. Ramshorn, and she began to listen. But she could not hear distinctly.

"There should be one bishop at least," the little man was saying, "or I don't know but he ought to be the archbishop,—a poor man, if possible,—one like the country parson Chaucer sets up in contrast with the regular clergy,—whose main business should be to travel about from university to university, from college to college, from school to school, warning off all young men who did not know within themselves that it was neither for position, nor income, nor study, nor influence, that they sought to minister in the temple, from entering the church. As from holy ground, he would warn them off."

Mrs. Ramshorn fancied, from certain obscure associations

in her own mind that he was speaking of dissenting ministers and persons of low origin, who might wish to enter the church for the sake of *bettering themselves*, and, holding as she did that no church preferment should be obtained except by persons of good family and position, qualified to keep up the dignity of the profession, she was not a little gratified to hear, as she supposed, the same sentiments from the mouth of such an illiterate person as, taking no note of his somewhat remarkable utterance, she imagined Polwarth to be. Therefore she proceeded to patronise him yet a little farther.

"I quite agree with you," she said graciously. "None but such as you describe should presume to set foot within the sacred precincts of the profession."

Polwarth did not much relish Mrs. Ramshorn's style, and was considerably surprised at receiving such a hearty approval of a proposed reformation in clerical things, reaching even to the archiepiscopal, which he had put half-humorously, and yet in thorough earnest, for the ear of Wingfold only. He was little enough desirous of pursuing the conversation with Mrs. Ramshorn; Charity herself does not require of a man to cast his precious things at the feet of my lady Disdain; but he must reply.

"Yes," he said, "the great evil in the church has always been the presence in it of persons unsuited for the work there required of them. One very simple sifting rule would be, that no one should be admitted to holy orders who had not first proved himself capable of making a better living in some other calling."

"I cannot go with you so far as that—so few careers are open to gentlemen," rejoined Mrs. Ramshorn. "Besides—take the bar for instance: the forensic style a man must there acquire would hardly become the pulpit. Bnt it would not be a bad rule that every one, for admission to holy orders, should be possessed of property sufficient at least to live upon. With that for a foundation, his living would begin at once to tell, and he would immediately occupy the superior position every clergyman ought to have."

"What I was thinking of," said Polwarth, "was mainly the experience in life he would gather by having to make his own living; that, behind the counter or the plough, or in the workshop, he would come to know men and their struggles and their thoughts—"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Ramshorn. "But I must be under some misapprehension! It is not possible that you can be speaking of the *church*—of the clerical *profession*. The moment that is brought within the reach of such people as you describe, that moment the church sinks to the level of the catholic priesthood."

"Say, rather, to the level of Jeremy Taylor," returned Polwarth, "who was the son of a barber; or of Tillotson, who was the son of a clothier, or something of the sort, and certainly a fierce dissenter. His enemies said the archbishop himself was never baptized. By the way, he was not ordained till he was thirty—and that bears on what I was just saying to Mr. Wingfold, that I would have no one ordained till after forty, by which time he would know whether he had any real call or only a temptation to the church, from the base hope of an easy living.

By this time Mrs. Ramshorn had had more than enough of it. The man was a leveller, a chartist, a positivist—a despiser of dignities!

"Mr.—— Mr.—— I don't know your name—you will oblige me by uttering no more such vile slanders in my company. You are talking about what you do not in the least understand. The man who does not respect the religion of his native country is capable of—of—of *anything*.—I am astonished, Mr. Wingfold, at your allowing a member of your congregation to speak with so little regard for the feelings of the clergy. You forget, sir, when you attribute what you call base motives to the cloth—you forget who said the labourer was worthy of his hire."

"I hope not, madam. I only venture to suggest that though the labourer is worthy of his hire, not every man is worthy of the labour."

Wingfold was highly amused at the turn things had taken.

Polwarth looked annoyed at having allowed himself to be beguiled into such an utterly useless beating of the air.

"My friend *has* some rather peculiar notions, Mrs. Ramshorn," said the curate; "but you must admit that it was your approval that encouraged him to go on."

"It is quite as well to know what people think," answered Mrs. Ramshorn, pretending she had drawn him out from suspicion. "My husband used to say that very few of the clergy had any notion of the envy and opposition of the lower orders, both to them personally, and the doctrines they taught. To low human nature the truth has always been unpalatable."

What precisely she meant by *the truth* it would be hard to say, but if the visual embodiment of it was not a departed dean, it was at least always associated in her mind with a cathedral choir, and a portly person in silk stockings.

Here happily Leopold woke, and his eyes fell upon the gate-keeper.

"Ah, Mr. Polwarth! I am so glad to see you!" he said, "I am getting on, you see. It will be over soon."

"I see," replied Polwarth, going up to him, and taking his offered hand in both his. "I could almost envy you for having got so near the end of your troubles."

"Are you sure it will be the end of them, sir?"

"Of some of them at least, I hope, and those the worst. I cannot be sure of anything but that all things work together for good to them that love God."

"I don't know yet whether I do love God."

"Not the Father of Jesus Christ?"

"If God is really just like him, I don't see how any man could help loving him. But, do you know? I am terrified sometimes at the thought of seeing *my* father. He was such a severe man! I am afraid he will scorn me."

"Never—if he has got into heavenly ways. And you have your mother there too, have you not?"

"Oh! yes; I did not think of that. I don't remember much of her."

"Anyhow you have God there, and you must rest in him.

He will not forget you, for that would be ceasing to be God. If God were to forget for one moment, the universe would grow black—vanish—rush out again from the realm of law and order into chaos and night."

"But I have been wicked."

"The more need you have, if possible, of your Father in heaven."

Here Mrs. Ramshorn beckoned the attendance of the curate where she sat a few yards off on the other side of Leopold. She was a little ashamed of having condescended to lose her temper, and when the curate went up to her, said, with an attempt at gaiety:

"Is your odd little friend, as you call him, all——?" And she tapped her lace cap carefully with her finger.

"Rather more so than most people," answered Wingfold. "He is a very remarkable man."

"He speaks as if he had seen better days—though where he can have gathered such detestable revolutionary notions, I can't think."

"He is a man of education, as you see," said the curate.

"You don't mean he has been to Oxford or Cambridge?"

"No. His education has been of a much higher sort than is generally found there. He knows ten times as much as most university men."

"Ah, yes; but that goes for nothing: he hasn't the standing. And if he had been to Oxford, he never could have imbibed such notions. Besides—his manners! To speak of the clergy as he did in the hearing of one whose whole history is bound up with the church!"

She meant herself, not Wingfold.

"But of course," she went on, "there must be something *very* wrong with him to know so much as you say, and occupy such a menial position! Nothing but a gate-keeper, and talk like that about bishops and what not! People that are crooked in body are always crooked in mind too. I dare say now he has quite a coterie of friends and followers amongst the lowers orders in Glaston. He's just the sort of man to lead the working classes astray. No doubt he is a very in-

teresting study for a young man like you, but you must take care ; you may be misunderstood. A young clergyman *can't* be too cautious—if he has any hope of rising in his profession.—A gate-keeper indeed ! "

"Wasn't it something like that David wanted to be ?" said the curate.

"Mr. Wingfold, I never allow any such foolish jests in my hearing. It was a *door*-keeper the Psalmist said—and to the house of God, not a nobleman's park."

"A verger, I suppose," thought Wingfold.—"Seriously, Mrs. Ramshorn, that poor little atom of a creature is the wisest man I know," he said.

"Likely enough, in *your* judgment, Mr. Wingfold," said the dean's widow, and drew herself up.

The curate accepted his disimssal, and joined the little man by Leopold's chair.

"I wish you two could be with me when I am dying," said Leopold.

"If you will let your sister know your wish, you may easily have it," said the curate.

"It will be just like saying good-bye at the pier-head, and pushing off alone—you can't get more than one into the boat —out, out, alone, into the infinite ocean of—nobody knows what or where," said Leopold.

"Except those that are there already, and they will be waiting to receive you," said Polwarth. "You may well hope, if you have friends to see you off, you will have friends to welcome you too. But I think it's not so much like setting off from the pier-head, as getting down the side of the ocean-ship, to land at the pier-head, where your friends are all standing looking out for you."

"Well ! I don't know !" said Leopold, with a sigh of weariness. I'm thankful sometimes that I've grown stupid. I suppose it's with dying. I didn't use to feel so. Sometimes I seem not to know or care anything about anything. I only want to stop coughing and aching and go to sleep."

"Jesus was glad to give up his spirit into his Father's hands. He was very tired before he got away."

"Thank you. Thank you. I have him. He is somewhere. You can't mention his name but it brings me something to live and hope for. If he is there, all will be well. And if I do get too tired to care for anything, he won't mind; he will only let me go to sleep, and wake me up again by and by when I am rested."

He closed his eyes.

"I want to go to bed," he said.

They carried him into the house.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

RACHEL AND LEOPOLD.

EVERY day after this, so long as the weather continued warm, it was Leopold's desire to be carried out to the meadow. Once, at his earnest petition, instead of setting him down in the usual place, they went on with him into the park, but he soon wished to be taken back to the meadow. He did not like the trees to come between him and his bed : they made him feel like a rabbit that was too far from its hole, he said ; and he was never tempted to try it again.

Regularly too every day, about one o'clock, the gnome-like form of the gate-keeper would issue from the little door in the park fence, and come marching across the grass towards Leopold's chair, which was set near the small clump of trees already mentioned. The curate was almost always there, not talking much to the invalid, but letting him know every now and then by some little attention or word, or merely by showing himself, that he was near. Sometimes he would take refuge from the heat, which the Indian never felt too great, amongst the trees, and there would generally be thinking out what he wanted to say to his people the next Sunday. One thing he found strange, and could not satisfy himself concerning, namely, that although his mind was so much occupied with Helen that he often seemed unable to

think consecutively upon any subject, he could always foresee his sermon best when, seated behind one of the trees, he could by moving his head see her at work beside Leopold's chair. But the thing that did carry him through became plain enough to him afterwards: his faith in God was all the time growing—and that through what seemed at the time only a succession of interruptions. Nothing is so ruinous to progress in which effort is needful, as satisfaction with apparent achievement; that ever sounds a halt; but Wingfold's experience was that no sooner did he set his foot on the lowest hillock of self-gratulation, than some fresh difficulty came that threw him prostrate; and he rose again only in the strength of the necessity for deepening and broadening his foundations that he might build yet higher, trust yet farther: that was the only way not to lose everything. He was gradually learning that his faith must be an absolute one, claiming from God everything the love of a perfect Father could give, or the needs he had created in his child could desire; that he must not look to himself first for help, or imagine that the divine was only the supplement to the weakness and failure of the human; that the highest effort of the human was to lay hold of the divine. He learned that he could keep no simplest law in its loveliness until he was possessed of the same spirit whence that law sprung; that he could not even love Helen aright, simply, perfectly, unselfishly, except through the presence of the originating Love; that the one thing wherein he might imitate the free creative will of God was, to will the presence and power of that will which gave birth to his. It was the vital growth of this faith even when he was too much troubled to recognise the fact that made him strong in the midst of weakness; when the son of man cried out, *Let this cup pass*, the son of God in him could yet cry, *Let thy will be done.* He could '*inhabit trembling*,' and yet be brave. Mrs. Ramshorn generally came to the meadow to see how the invalid was after he was settled, but she seldom stayed: she was not fond of nursing, neither was there any need of her assistance; and as Helen never dreamed now of opposing the

smallest wish of her brother, there was no longer any obstruction to the visits of Polwarth, which were eagerly looked for by Leopold.

One day the little man did not appear, but soon after his usual time the still more gnome-like form of his little niece came scrambling rather than walking over the meadow. Gently and modestly, almost shyly, she came up to Helen, made her a courtesy like a village school-girl, and said while she glanced at Leopold now and then with an ocean of tenderness in her large, clear woman-eyes :

"My uncle is sorry, Miss Lingard, that he cannot come to see your brother to-day, but he is laid up with an attack of asthma. He wished Mr. Lingard to know that he was thinking of him :—shall I tell you just what he said ?"

Helen bent her neck : she did not feel much interest in the matter. But Leopold said,

"Every word of such a good man is precious : tell me, please."

Rachel turned to him with the flush of a white rose on her face.

"I asked him, sir—'Shall I tell him you are praying for him ?' and he said, 'No. I am not exactly praying for him, but I am thinking of God and him together.'"

The tears rose in Leopold's eyes. Rachel lifted her baby-hand and stroked the dusky long fingered one that lay upon the arm of the chair.

"Dear Mr. Lingard," she said,—Helen stopped in the middle of an embroidery stitch and gave her a look as if she were about to ask for her testimonials—"I could well wish, if it pleased God, that I were as near home as you."

Leopold took her hand in his.

"Do you suffer then ?" he asked.

"Just look at me," she answered with a smile that was very pitful, though she did not mean it for such, "—shut up all my life in this epitome of deformity ! But I ain't grumbling : that would be a fine thing ! My house is not so small but God can get into it. Only you can't think how tired I often am of it."

"Mr. Wingfold was telling me yesterday that some people fancy St. Paul was little and misshapen, and that that was his thorn in the flesh."

"I don't think that can be true, or he would never have compared his body to a tabernacle, for, oh dear! it won't stretch an inch to give a body room. I don't think either, if that had been the case, he would have said he didn't want it taken off but another put over it. I do want mine taken off me, and a downright good new one put on instead—something not quite so far off your sister's there, Mr. Lingard. But I'm ashamed of talking like this. It came of wanting to tell you I can't be sorry you are going when I should so dearly like to go myself."

"And I would gladly stay awhile, and that in a house no bigger than yours, if I had a conscience of the same sort in my back-parlour," said Leopold smiling. "But when I am gone the world will be the cleaner for it.—Do you know about God the same way your uncle does, Miss Polwarth?"

"I hope I do—a little. I doubt if anybody knows as much as he does," she returned, very seriously. "But God knows about us all the same, and he don't limit his goodness to us by our knowledge of him. It's so wonderful that he can be all to everybody! That is his Godness, you know. We can't be all to any one person. Do what we will, we can't let anybody see into us even. We are all in bits and spots. But I fancy it's a sign that we come of God that we don't like it. How gladly I would help you, Mr. Lingard, and I can do nothing for you.—I'm afraid your beautiful sister thinks me very forward. But she don't know what it is to lie awake all night sometimes, think-thinking about my beautiful brothers and sisters that I can't get near to do anything for."

"What an odd creature!" thought Helen, to whom her talk conveyed next to nothing. "But I daresay they are both out of their minds. Poor things! they must have a hard time of it with one thing and another!"

"I beg your pardon again for talking so much," con-

cluded Rachel, and, with a courtesy first to the one then to the other, walked away. Her gait was no square march like her uncle's, but a sort of sidelong propulsion, rendered more laborious by the thick grass of the meadow.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE BLOOD-HOUND.

I NEED not follow the steps by which the inquiry office became so far able to enlighten the mother of Emmeline concerning the person and habits of the visitor to the deserted shaft, that she had now come to Glaston in pursuit of yet farther discovery concerning him. She had no plan in her mind, and as yet merely intended going to church and everywhere else where people congregated, in the hope of something turning up to direct inquiry. Not a suspicion of Leopold had ever crossed her. She did not even know that he had a sister in Glaston, for Emmeline's friends had not all been intimate with her parents.

On the morning after her arrival, she went out early to take a walk, and brood over her cherished vengeance ; and finding her way into the park, wandered about in it for some time. Leaving it at length by another gate, and inquiring the way to Glaston, she was directed to a footpath that would lead her thither across the fields. Following this she came to a stile, and being rather weary with her long walk, sat down on it.

The day was a grand autumnal one. But nature had no charms for her. Indeed had she not been close shut in the gloomy chamber of her own thoughts, she would not thus have walked abroad alone ; for nature was to her a dull,

featureless void ; while her past was scarcely of the sort to invite retrospection, and her future was clouded.

It so fell that just then Leopold was asleep in his chair,—every morning he slept a little soon after being carried out,—and that chair was in its usual place in the meadow, with the clump of trees between it and the stile. Wingfold was seated in the shade of the trees, but Helen, happening to want something for her work, went to him and committed her brother to his care until she should return, whereupon he took her place. Almost the same moment, however, he spied Polwarth coming from the little door in the fence, and went to meet him. When he turned, he saw, to his surprise, a lady standing beside the sleeping youth, and gazing at him with a strange intentness. Polwarth had seen her come from the clump of trees, and supposed her a friend. The curate walked hastily back, fearing he might wake and be startled at sight of the stranger. So intent was the gazing lady, that he was within a few yards of her before she heard him. She started, gave one glance at the curate, and hurried away towards the town. There was an agitation in her movements that Wingfold did not like ; a suspicion crossed his mind, and he resolved to follow her. In his turn he made over his charge to Polwarth, and set off after the lady.

The moment the eyes of Emmeline's mother fell upon the countenance of Leopold, whom, notwithstanding the change that suffering had caused, she recognised at once, partly by the peculiarity of his complexion, the suspicion, almost conviction, awoke in her that here was the murderer of her daughter. That he looked so ill seemed only to confirm the likelihood. Her first idea was to wake him and see the effect of her sudden presence. Finding he was attended, however, she hurried away to inquire in the town and discover all she could about him.

A few moments after Polwarth had taken charge of him, and while he stood looking on him tenderly, the youth woke with a start.

"Where is Helen ?" he said.

"I have not see her. Ah, here she comes!"

"Did you find me all alone, then?"

"Mr. Wingfold was with you. He gave you up to me, because he had to go into the town."

He looked inquiringly at his sister as she came up, and she looked in the same way at Polwarth.

"I feel as if I had been lying all alone in this wide field," said Leopold, "and as if Emmeline had been by me, though I didn't see her."

Polwarth looked after the two retiring forms, which were now almost at the end of the meadow, and about to issue on the high road.

Helen followed his look with hers. A sense of danger seized her. She trembled and kept behind Leopold's chair.

"Have you been coughing much to-day?" asked the gate-keeper.

"Yes, a good deal—before I came out. But it does not seem to do much good."

"What good would you have it do?"

"I mean, it doesn't do much to get it over. O Mr. Polwarth, I am *so* tired!"

"Poor fellow! I suppose it looks to you as if it would never be over. But all the millions of the dead have got through it before you. I don't know that that makes much difference to the one who is going through it. And yet it is a sort of company. Only, the Lord of Life is with you, and that is real comphny, even in dying, when no one else can be with you."

"If I could only feel he was with me!"

"You may feel his presence without knowing what it is."

"I hope it isn't wrong to wish it over, Mr. Polwarth?"

"I don't think it is wrong to wish anything you can talk to him about and submit to his will. St. Paul says, 'In every thing let your requests be made known unto God.'"

"I sometimes feel as if I would not ask him for anything, but just let him give me what he likes."

"We must not want to be better than is required of us, for that is at once to grow worse."

"I don't quite understand you."

"Not to ask may seem to you a more submissive way, but I don't think it is so childlike. It seems to me far better to say, 'O Lord, I should like this or that, but I would rather not have it if thou dost not like it also." Such prayer brings us into conscious and immediate relations with God. Remember, our thoughts are then passing to him, sent by our will into his mind. Our Lord taught us to pray always and not get tired of it. God, however poor creatures we may be, would have us talk to him, for then he can speak to us better than when we turn no face to him."

"I wonder what I shall do the first thing when I find myself out—out, I mean, in the air, you know."

"It does seem strange we should know so little of what is in some sense so near us! that such a thin veil should be so impenetrable! I fancy the first thing I should do would be to pray."

"Then you think we shall pray there—wherever it is?"

"It seems to me as if I should go up in prayer the moment I got out of this dungeon of a body. I am wrong to call it a dungeon, for it lies open to God's fair world, and the loveliness of the earth comes into me through eyes and ears just as well as into you. Still it is a pleasant thought that it will drop off me some day. But for prayer—I think all will pray there more than here—in their hearts and souls, I mean."

"Then where would be the harm if you were to pray for me after I am gone?"

"Nowhere that I know. It were indeed a strange thing if I might pray for you up to the moment when you ceased to breathe, and therewith an iron gate closed between us, and I could not even reach you through the ear of the Father of us both! It is a faithless doctrine, for it supposes either that those parted from us can do without prayer, the thing Jesus himself could not do without, seeing it was his highest joy, or that God has so parted those who are in him from these who are in him, that there is no longer any relation, even with God, common to them. The thing to me takes the form of an absurdity."

"Ah, then, pray for me when I am dying, and don't be careful to stop when you think I am gone, Mr. Polwarth."

"I will remember," said the little man.

And now Helen had recovered herself and came and took her usual seat by her brother's side. She cast an anxious glance now and then into Polwarth's face, but dared not ask him anything.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE BLOOD-HOUND TRAVERSED.

EMMELINE'S mother had not gone far before she became aware that she was followed. It was a turning of the tables which she did not relish. As would not have been unnatural, even had she been at peace with all the world, a certain feeling of undefined terror came upon her and threatened to overmaster her. It was the more oppressive that she did not choose to turn and face her pursuer, feeling that to do so would be to confess consciousness of cause. The fate of her daughter, seldom absent from her thoughts, now rose before her in association with herself, and was gradually swelling uneasiness into terror: who could tell but this man pressing on her heels in the solitary meadow, and not the poor youth who lay dying there in the chair, and who might indeed be only another of his victims, was the murderer of Emmeline! Unconsciously she accelerated her pace until it was almost a run, but did not thereby widen, by a single yard, the distance between her and the curate.

When she came out on the high road, she gave a glance in each direction, and, avoiding the country, made for the houses. A short lane led her into Pine Street. There she felt safe, the more that it was market-day and a good many people about, and slackened her pace, feeling confident that

her pursuer, whoever he was, would now turn aside. But she was disappointed, for, casting a glance over her shoulder, she saw that he still kept the same distance behind her. She saw also, in that single look, that he was well known, for several were saluting him at once. What could it mean? It must be the G. B. of the Temple! Should she stop and challenge his pursuit? The obstacle to this was a certain sinking at the heart accounted for by an old memory. She must elude him instead. But she did not know a single person in the place, or one house where she could seek refuge. There was an hotel before her! But, unattended, heated, disordered, to all appearance disreputable, what account could she give of herself? That she had been followed by some one everybody knew, and to whom everybody would listen! Feebly debating thus with herself, she hurried along the pavement of Pine Street, with the Abbey church before her.

The footsteps behind her grew louder and quicker: the man had made up his mind and was coming up with her! He might be mad, or ready to run all risks! Probably he knew his life at stake through her perseverance and determination.

On came the footsteps, for the curate had indeed made up his mind to speak to her, and either remove or certify his apprehensions. Nearer yet and nearer they came. Her courage and strength were giving way together, and she should be at his mercy. She darted into a shop, sank on a chair by the counter, and begged for a glass of water. A young woman ran to fetch it, while Mr. Drew went up-stairs for a glass of wine. Returning with it he came from behind the counter, and approached the lady where she sat leaning her head upon it.

Meantime the curate also had entered the shop, and placed himself where he might, unseen by her, await her departure, for he could not speak to her there. He had her full in sight when Mr. Drew went up to her.

"Do me the favour, madam," he said—but said no more. For at the sound of his voice, the lady gave a violent start,

and raising her head looked at him. The wine-glass dropped from his hand. She gave a half-choked cry and sped from the shop.

The curate was on the spring after her when he was arrested by the look of the draper : he stood fixed where she had left him, white and trembling as if he had seen a ghost. He went up to him, and said in a whisper :

"Who is she?"

"Mrs. Drew," answered the draper, and the curate was after her like a greyhound.

A little crowd of the shop-people gathered in consternation about their master.

"Pick up those pieces of glass, and call Jacob to wipe the floor," he said—then walked to the door, and stood staring after the curate as he all but ran to overtake the swiftly gliding figure.

The woman, ignorant that her pursuer was again upon her track, and hardly any longer knowing what she did, hurried blindly towards the churchyard. Presently the curate relaxed his speed, hoping she would enter it, when he would have her in a fit place for the interview upon which he was, if possible, more determined than ever, now that he had gained so unexpectedly such an absolute hold of her. "She must be Emmeline's mother," he said to himself,—"fit mother for such a daughter." The moment he caught sight of the visage lifted from its regard of the sleeping youth, he had suspected the fact. He had not had time to analyse its expression, but there was something dreadful in it. A bold question would determine the suspicion.

She entered the churchyard, saw the Abbey door open and hastened to it. She was in a state of bewilderment and terror that would have crazed a weaker woman. In the porch she cast a glance behind her : there again was her pursuer ! She sprang into the church. A woman was dusting a pew not far from the door.

"Who is that coming?" she asked, in a tone and with a mien that appalled Mrs. Jenkins. She had but to stretch her neck a little to see through the porch.

"Why it be only the parson, ma'am!" she answered.

"Then I shall hide myself, over there, and you must tell him I went out by that other door. Here's a sovereign for you."

"I thank you, ma'am," said Mrs. Jenkins, looking wistfully at the sovereign, which was a great sum of money to a sexton's wife with children; then instantly going on with her dusting; "but it ain't no use tryin' of tricks with our parson. *He* ain't one of your Mollies. A man as don't play no tricks with hisself, as I heerd a gentleman say, it ain't no use tryin' no tricks with *him*."

Almost while she spoke the curate entered. The suppliant drew herself up and endeavoured to look both dignified and injured.

"Would you oblige me by walking this way for a moment?" he said, coming straight to her.

Without a word she followed him a long way up the church, to the stone screen which divided the chancel from the nave. There in sight of Mrs. Jenkins, but so far off that she could not hear a word said, he asked her to take a seat on the steps that led up to the door, in the centre of the screen. Again she obeyed, and Wingfold sat down near her.

"Are you Emmeline's mother?" he said.

The gasp, the expression of eye and cheek, the whole startled response of the woman, revealed that he had struck the truth. But she made no answer.

"You had better be open with me," he said, "for I mean to be very open with you."

She stared at him, but either could not or would not speak. Probably it was caution, she must hear more.

The curate was already excited, and I fear now got a little angry, for the woman was not pleasant to his eyes.

"I want to tell you," he said "that the poor youth whom your daughter's behaviour made a murderer of—"

She gave a cry, and turned like ashes. The curate was ashamed of himself.

"It sounds cruel," he said, "but it is the truth. I say

he is now dying—will be gone after her in a few weeks. The same blow killed both, only one has taken longer to die. No end can be served by bringing him to justice. Indeed if he were arrested, he would but die on the way to prison. I have followed you to persuade you, if I can, to leave him to his fate and not urge it on. If ever man was sorry, or suffered for his crime—"

"And pray what is that to me, sir?" cried the avenging mother, who, finding herself entreated, straightway became arrogant. "Will it give me back my child? The villain took her precious life without giving her a moment to prepare for eternity, and you ask me—her mother—to let him go free! I will not. I have vowed vengeance, and I will have it."

"Allow me to say that if you die in that spirit, you will be far worse prepared for eternity than I trust your poor daughter was."

"What is that to you? If I choose to run the risk, it is my business. I tell you it shall not be my fault if the wretch is not brought to the gallows."

"But he cannot live to reach it. The necessary preliminaries would waste all that is left of his life. I only ask of you to let him die in what peace is possible to him. We must forgive our enemies, you know. But indeed he is no enemy of yours."

"No enemy of mine! The man who murdered my child no enemy of mine! I am his enemy then, and that he shall find. If I cannot bring him to the gallows, I can at least make every man and woman in the country point the finger of scorn and hatred at him. I can bring him and all his to disgrace and ruin. Their pride indeed! They were far too grand to visit me, but not to send a murderer into my family. I am in my rights, and I will have justice. We shall see if they are too grand to have a nephew hung! My poor lovely innocent! I *will* have justice on the foul villain. Cringing shall not turn me."

Her lips were white and her teeth set. She rose with the slow movement of one whose intent, if it had blossomed into

passion, was yet rooted in determination, and turned to leave the church.

"It might hamper your proceedings a little," said Wingfold, "if in the meantime a charge of bigamy were brought against yourself, *Mrs. Drew!*"

Her back towards the curate, and for a moment she stood like another pillar of salt. Then she began to tremble and laid hold of the carved top of a bench. But her strength failed her completely; she sank on her knees and fell on the floor with a deep moan.

The curate called Mrs. Jenkins and sent her for water. With some difficulty they brought her to herself.

She rose, shuddered, drew her shawl about her, and said to the woman,

"I am sorry to give so much trouble. When does the next train start for London?"

"Within an hour," answered the curate. "I will see you safe to it."

"Excuse me; I prefer going alone."

"That I cannot permit."

"I must go to my lodgings first."

"I will go with you."

She cast on him a look of questioning hate, yielded, and laid two fingers on his offered arm.

They walked out of the church together and to the cottage where, for privacy, she had lodged. There he left her for half an hour, and, yielding to her own necessities and not his entreaties, she took some refreshment. In the glowing sullenness of foiled revenge, the smoke of which was crossed every now and then by a flash of hate, she sat until he returned.

"Before I go with you to the train," said the curate, re-entering, "you must give me your word to leave young Lingard unmolested. I know my friend Mr. Drew has no desire to trouble you, but I am equally confident that he will do whatever I ask him. If you will not promise me, from the moment you get into the train you shall be watched.—Do you promise?"

She was silent, with cold gleaming eyes, for a time, then said,

"How am I to know that this is not a trick to save his life?"

"You saw him; you could see he is dying. I tell you I do not think he can live a month. His disease is making rapid progress. He must go with the first of the cold weather."

She could not help believing him.

"I promise," she said. "But you are cruel to compel a mother to forgive the villain that stabbed her daughter to the heart."

"If the poor lad were not dying I should see that he gave himself up, as indeed he set out to do some weeks ago, but was frustrated by his friends. He is dying for love of her. I believe I say so with truth. Pity and love and remorse and horror of his deed have brought him to the state you saw him in. To be honest with you, he might have got better enough to be tortured for a while in a madhouse, for no jury would have brought him in anything but insane at the time, with the evidence that would have been adduced; but in his anxiety to see me one day—for his friends at that time did not favour my visits, because I encouraged him to surrender—he got out of the house alone to come to me, but fainted in the churchyard, and lay on the damp earth for the better part of an hour, I fancy, before we found him. Still, had it not been for his state of mind, he might have got over that, too.—As you hope to be forgiven, you must forgive him."

He held out his hand to her. She was a little softened, and gave him hers.

"Allow me one word more," said the curate, "and then we shall go: Our crimes are friends that will hunt us either to the bosom of God, or the pit of hell."

She looked down, but her look was still sullen and proud.

The curate rose, took up her bag, went with her to the station, got her ticket, and saw her off.

Then he hastened back to Drew and told him the whole story.

"Poor woman!" said her husband. "But God only knows how much *I* am to blame for all this. If I had behaved better to her she might have never left me, and your poor young friend would now be well and happy."

"Perhaps consuming his soul to a cinder with that odious drug," said Wingfold. "'Tis true, as Edgar in King Lear says:

> "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us;

but he takes our sins on himself, and while he drives them out of us with a whip of scorpions, he will yet make them work his ends. He defeats our sins, makes them prisoners, forces them into the service of good, chains them like galley-slaves to the rowing-benches of the gospel-ship, or sets them like ugly gurgoyles or corbels or brackets in the walls of his temples. No, that last figure I retract. I don't like it. It implies their continuance."

"Poor woman!" said Mr. Drew again, who for once had been inattentive to the curate. "Well! she is sorely punished, too."

"She will be worse punished yet," said the curate, "if I can read the signs of character. *She* is not repentant yet—though I did spy in her just once a touch of softening."

"It is an awful retribution," said the draper, "and I may yet have to bear my share—God help me!"

"I suspect it is the weight of her own crime that makes her so fierce to avenge her daughter. I doubt if anything makes one so unforgiving as guilt unrepented of."

"Well, I must try to find out where she is, and keep an eye upon her."

"That will be easy enough. But why?"

"Because, if, as you think, there is more evil in store for her, I may yet have it in my power to do her some service. I wonder if Mr. Polwarth would call that *divine service*," he added with one of his sunny smiles.

"Indeed he would," answered the curate.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE BEDSIDE.

GEORGE BASCOMBE, when he went to Paris, had no thought of deserting Helen. He had good ground for fearing that it might be ruinous both to Lingard and himself to undertake his defence. From Paris he wrote often to Helen, and she replied—not so often, yet often enough to satisfy him ; and as soon as she was convinced that Leopold could not recover, she let him know, whereupon he instantly began his preparations for returning.

Before he came, the weather had changed once more. It was now cold, and the cold had begun at once to tell upon the invalid. There are some natures to which cold, moral, spiritual, or physical, is lethal, and Lingard's was of this class. When the dying leaves began to shiver in the breath of the coming winter, the very brightness of the sun to look gleamy, and nature to put on the unfriendly aspect of a world not made for living in, but for shutting out—when all things took the turn of reminding man that his life lay not in them, Leopold began to shrink and withdraw. He could not face the ghastly persistence of the winter, which would come let all the souls of the summer-nations shrink and protest as they might : let them creep shivering to Hades ; he would have his day.

His sufferings were now considerable, but he never com-

plained. Restless and fevered and sick at heart, it was yet more from the necessity of a lovely nature than from any virtue of will that he was so easy to nurse, accepting so readily all ministrations. Never exacting and never refusing, he was always gently grateful, giving a sort of impression that he could have been far more thankful had he not known the object of the kindnesses so unworthy. Next to Wingfold's and his sister's, the face he always welcomed most was that of the gate-keeper—indeed I ought hardly to say *next* to theirs ; for the curate was to him as a brother, Polwarth was like a father in Christ. He came every day, and every day, almost till that of his departure, Leopold had something to ask him about or something to tell him.

"I am getting so stupid, Mr. Polwarth!" he said once. "It troubles me much. I don't seem to care for anything now. I don't want to hear the New Testament: I would rather hear a child's story—something that did not want thinking about. If I am not coughing, I am content. I could lie for hours and hours and never think more than what goes creeping through my mind no faster than a canal in Holland. When I am coughing,—I don't think about anything then either—only long for the fit to be over and let me back again into Sleepy Hollow. All my past life seems to be gone from me. I don't care about it. Even my crime looks like something done ages ago. I know it is mine, and I would rather it were not mine, but it is as if a great cloud had come and swept away the world in which it took place. I am afraid sometimes that I am beginning not to care even about that. I say to myself, I shall be sorry again by and by, but I can't think about it now. I feel as if I had handed it over to God to lay down where I should find it again when I was able to think and be sorry."

This was a long utterance for him to make, but he had spoken slowly and with frequent pauses. Polwarth did not speak once, feeling that a dying man must be allowed to ease his mind after his own fashion, and take as much time to it as he pleased. Helen and Wingfold both would have told him he must not tire himself, but that Polwarth never

did. The dying should not have their utterances checked, or the feeling of not having finished forced upon them. They will always have plenty of the feeling without that.

A fit of coughing compelled him to break off, and when it was over, he lay panting and weary, but with his large eyes questioning the face of Polwarth. Then the little man spoke.

"He must give us every sort of opportunity for trusting him," he said. "The one he now gives you, is this dulness that has come over you. Trust him through it, submitting to it and yet trusting against it, and you get the good of it. In your present state perhaps you cannot even try to bring about by force of will any better state of feeling or higher intellectual condition; but you can say to God something like this: 'See, Lord, I am dull and stupid, and care for nothing: take thou care of everything for me, heart, and mind, and all. I leave all to thee. Wilt thou not at length draw me out of this my frozen wintry state? Let me not shrink from fresh life and thought and duty, or be unready to come out of the shell of my sickness when thou sendest for me. I wait thy will. I wait even the light that I feel now as if I dared not encounter for weariness of body and faintness of spirit.'"

"Ah!" cried Leopold, "there you have touched it! How can you know so well what I feel?"

"Because I have often had to fight hard to keep death to his own province and not let him cross over into my spirit."

"Alas! I am not fighting at all; I am only letting things go."

"You are fighting more than you know, I suspect, for you are enduring, and that patiently. Suppose Jesus were to knock at the door now, and it was locked; suppose you knew it was he, and there was no one in the room to open it for him; suppose you were as weak as you are now, and seemed to care as little about him or anything else: what would you do?"

Leopold looked half amazed, as if wondering what his friend could be driving at with such a question.

"What else could I do but get up and open it?" he said.

"Would you not be tempted to lie still and wait till some one came?"

"No."

"Would you not say in your heart, 'The Lord knows I am very weak, and I should catch cold, and the exertion would make me cough dreadfully, and he won't mind if I lie still?'"

"That I wouldn't! What should I care what came to me? What would it matter so long as I got one look at him! Besides if he didn't want me to get up, he wouldn't knock."

"But suppose you knew that the moment you turned the key you would drop down, and when the Lord came in you would not see him."

"I can't think where you want to take me, Mr. Polwarth!" said the youth. "Even if I knew I should drop dead the moment I got on the floor, what would it matter! I should get to him the sooner then, and tell him why I didn't open the door. Can you suppose for a moment I should let any care for this miserable body of mine come between my eyes and the face of my Lord?"

"You see then that you do care about him a little, though a minute ago you didn't think it! There are many feelings in us that are not able to get upstairs the moment we call them. Be as dull and stupid as it pleases God to let you be, and trouble neither yourself nor him about that, only ask him to be with you all the same."

The little man dropped on his knees by the bedside, and said,

"O Lord Jesus, be near when it seems to us, as it seemed to thee once, that our Father has forsaken us, and gathered back to himself all the gifts he once gave us. Even thou who wast mighty in death, didst need the presence of thy Father to make thee able to endure: forget not us, the work of thy hands, yea, the labour of thy heart and spirit. Oh remember that we are his offspring, neither accountable for our own being, nor able to comfort or strengthen ourselves. If thou wert to leave us alone, we should cry out upon thee as on the mother who threw her babes to the wolves—and

there are no wolves able to terrify thee. Ah Lord ! we know thou leavest us not, only in our weakness we would comfort our hearts with the music of the words of faith. Thou canst not do other than care for us, Lord Christ, for whether we be glad or sorry, slow of heart or full of faith, all the same are we the children of thy Father. He sent us here, and never asked us if we would ; therefore thou must be with us, and give us repentance and humility and love and faith; that we may indeed be the children of thy Father who is in heaven. Amen."

While Polwarth was yet praying, the door had opened gently behind him, and Helen, not knowing that he was there, had entered with Bascombe. He neither heard their entrance, nor saw the face of disgust that George made behind his back. What was in Bascombe's deepest soul who shall tell ? Of that region he himself knew nothing. It was a silent, holy place into which he had never yet entered —therefore lonely and deserted as the top of Sinai after the cloud had departed. No—I will not say that : who knows what is where man cannot or will not look ? If George had sought there, perhaps he might have found traces of a presence not yet altogether vanished. In what he called and imagined his deepest soul, however, all he was now conscious of was a perfect loathing of the monstrous superstition so fitly embodied before him. The prayer of the kneeling absurdity was to him an audacious mockery of the infrangible laws of Nature ; this hulk of misshapen pottery actually presuming to believe that an invisible individual heard what he said because he crooked his hinges to say it ! It did not occur to George that the infrangible laws of Nature she had herself from the very first so agonisingly broken to the poor dwarf, she had been to him such a cruel step-mother, that he was in evil case indeed if he could find no father to give him fair play and a chance of the endurable. Was he so much to blame if he felt the annihilation offered by such theorists as George, not altogether a satisfactory counterpoise either to existence or its loss ? If, even, he were to fancy in his trouble that the old fable of an elder brother, something

more humble than grand, handsome George Bascombe, and more ready to help his little brothers and sisters, might be true, seeing that an old story is not necessarily a false one, and were to try after the hints it gave, surely in his condition such folly, however absurd to a man of George Bascombe's endowments, might of the more gifted ephemeros be pardoned if not pitied. Nor will I assert that he was altogether unaware of any admixture of the sad with the ludicrous when he saw the amorphous agglomerate of human shreds and patches kneeling by the bedside of the dying murderer, to pray some comfort into his passing soul. But his "gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it," while through Helen ran a cold shudder of disgust at the familiarity and irreverence of the little spiritual prig. How many of the judgments we are told not to judge and yet do judge must make the angels of the judging and the judged turn and look at each other and smile a sad smile, ere they set themselves to forget that which so sorely needs to be forgotten.

Polwarth rose from his knees unaware of a hostile presence.

"Leopold," he said, taking his hand, "I would gladly, if I might, walk with you through the shadow. But the heart of all hearts will be with you. Rest in your tent a little while, which is indeed the hollow of the Father's hand turned over you, with your strong brother watching the door. Your imagination cannot go beyond the truth of him who is the Father of lights, or of him who is the Elder Brother of men."

Leopold answered only with his eyes. Polwarth turned to go and saw the on-lookers. They stood between him and the door, but parted and made room for him to pass. Neither spoke. He made a bow first to one and then to the other, looking up in the face of each, unabashed by a smile of scorn or blush of annoyance, but George took no notice, walking straight to the bed the moment the way was clear. Helen's conscience, however, or heart, smote her, and, returning his bow, she opened the door for her brother's friend. He thanked her, and went his way.

"Poor dear fellow!" said George kindly, and stroked the thin hand laid in his: "can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing but be good to Helen when I am gone, and tell her now and then that I am not dead but living in the hope of seeing her again one day before long. She might forget sometimes—not me, but that, you know."

"Yes, yes, I'll see to it," answered George, in the evil tone of one who faithfully promises a child an impossibility. Of course there was no more harm in lying to a man who was just on the verge of being a man no more, and becoming only an unpleasant mass of chemicals, which a whole ant-heap of little laws would presently be carrying outside the gates of the organic, than there had been in lying to him when he supposed him a madman. Neither could any one blame him for inconsistency; for had he not always said, in the goodness of his heart, that he would never disturb the faith of old people drawing nigh their end, because such no more possessed the needful elasticity of brain to acommodate themselves to the subversion of previous modes of feeling and thought, unavoidable to the adoption of his precious revelation. Precious he did believe it, never having himself had one of those visions of infinite hope, which, were his theory once proved as true as he imagined it, must then indeed vanish for ever.

"Do you suffer much?" asked George.

"Yes—a good deal."

"Pain?"

"Not so much;—sometimes. The weakness is the worst. But it doesn't matter: God is with me."

"What good does that do you?" asked George, forgetting himself, half in contempt, half in a curiosity which he would have called, and which perhaps was scientific.

But Leopold took it in good faith, and answered,

"It sets it all right, and makes me able to be patient."

George laid down the hand he held, and turned sadly to Helen, but said nothing.

The next moment Wingfold entered. Helen kissed the dying hand, and left the room with George.

CHAPTER XC.

THE GARDEN.

TENDERLY he led her into the garden, and down the walks now bare of bordering flowers. To Helen it looked like a graveyard ; the dry bushes were the memorials of the buried flowers, and the cypress and box trees rose like the larger monuments of shapely stone. The day was a cold leaden one, that would have rained if it could, to get rid of the deadness at its heart, but no tears came. To the summer-house they went, under the cedar, and sat down. Neither spoke for some time.

"Poor Leopold!" said George at length, and took Helen's hand.

She burst into tears, and again for some time neither spoke.

"George, I can't bear it!" she said at length.

"It is very sad," answered George. "But he had a happy life, I don't doubt, up to — to —"

"What does that matter now? It is all a horrible farce. To begin so fair and lovely, and end so stormy and cold and miserable."

George did not like to say what he thought, namely, that it was Leopold's own doing. He did not see that therein lay the deepest depth of the misery—the thing that of all things needed help : all else might be borne ; the less that *could* be borne the better.

"It *is* horrible," he said. "But what can be done? What's done is done, and nobody can help it."

"There should be somebody to help it," said Helen.

"Ah! Should be!" said George. "Well, it's a comfort it will soon be over!"

"Is it?" returned Helen almost sharply. "But he's not your brother, and you don't know what it is to lose him! Oh how desolate the world will be without my darling!"

And again her tears found way.

"All that I can do to make up for the loss, dearest Helen," said George,—

"O George!" she cried, starting to her feet, "is there *no* hope? I don't mean of his getting better—that we do know the likelihoods of—but is there no hope of *some time* seeing him again? We know so little about all of it! *Might* there not be some way?"

But George was too honest in himself, and too true to his principles, to pretend anything to Helen. Hers was an altogether different case from Leopold's. Here was a young woman full of health, and life, and hope, with all her joys before her. Many suns must set before her sun would go down, many pale moons look lovely in her eyes, ere came those that would mock her with withered memories—a whole *hortus siccus* of passion-flowers. Why should he lie to *her* of a hope beyond the grave? Let the pleasures of the world be the dearer to her for the knowledge that they must so soon depart; let love be the sweeter for the mournful thought that it is a thing of the summer, and that when the winter comes it shall be no more. But perhaps George forgot one point. I will allow that the insects of a day, dying in a moment of delightful fruition, are blessed; but when the delicate Psyche, with her jewel-feathered wings, is beat about by a wind full of rain until she lies draggled in the dirt; when there are no more flowers, or if there be, the joy of her hovering is over, and yet death comes but slowly; when the mourners are going about the streets ere even the silver cord is loosed; when the past looks a mockery and the future a blank;—then perhaps, even to the correlatives of the most

triumphant natural selection, it may not merely seem as if something were wrong somewhere, but even as if there ought to be somebody to set wrong right. If Psyche should be so subdued to circumstance as to accept without question her supposed fate, then doubly woe for Psyche!

But if George could not lie, it was not necessary for him to speak the truth: silence was enough. A moment of it was all Helen could endure. She rose hastily, left the wintered summer-house, and walked back to the sick chamber. George followed a few paces behind, so far quenched that he did not overtake her to walk by her side, feeling he had no aid to offer her. Doubtless he could have told her of help at hand, but it was help that must come, that could neither be given nor taken, could not come the sooner for any prayer, and indeed could not begin to exist until the worst should be over: the nearest George came to believe in a saving power, was to console himself with the thought that *Time* would do everything for Helen.

CHAPTER XCI.

THE DEPARTURE.

AS LEOPOLD slowly departed, he seemed to his sister to draw along with him all that was precious in her life. She felt herself grow dull and indifferent. It was to no purpose that she upbraided herself with heartlessness; seemingly heartless her bosom remained. It was not that her mind was occupied with anything else than her brother, or drew comfort from another source; her feelings appeared to be dying with him who had drawn them forth more than any other. The battle was ending without even the poor pomp and circumstance of torn banners and wailful music.

Leopold said very little during the last few days. His fits of coughing were more frequent, and in the pauses he had neither strength nor desire to speak. When Helen came to his bedside, he would put out his hand to her, and she would sit down by him and hold it warm in hers. The hand of his sister was the point of the planet from which, like his mount of ascension, the spirit of the youth took its departure;—when he let that go he was gone. But he died asleep, as so many do; and fancied, I presume, that he was waking into his old life, when he woke into his new one.

Wingfold stood on the other side of the bed, with Polwarth

by him, for so had the departing wished it, and although he made no sign, I cannot but think he reaped some content therefrom. While yet he lingered, one of Helen's listless, straying glances was arrested by the countenance of the gate-keeper. It was so still and so rapt that she thought he must be seeing within the veil, and regarding what things were awaiting her brother on the reverse side of the two-sided wonder. But it was not so. Polwarth saw no more than she did: he was *only* standing in the presence of him who is not the God of the dead but of the living. Whatever lay in that Will was the life of whatever came of that Will, that is, of every creature, and up to that Will, to the face of the Father, he lifted, in his prayerful thought, the heart and mind and body of the youth now passing through the birth of death. "I know not," he would have said, had he been questioned concerning his spiritual attitude, "how my prayer should for another work anything with the perfect Giver, but at least I will not leave my friend behind when I go into the presence of his Father and my Father. And I believe there is something in it I cannot yet see."

Wingfold's anxiety was all for Helen. He could do no more for Leopold, nor did he need more from man. As to many of the things that puzzled them most, he was on his way to know more; he would soon be in the heart of what seemed likely to remain a long secret to him. But there was his sister, about to be left behind him without his hopes; for her were dreary days at hand; and the curate prayed the God of comfort and consolation to visit her.

Mrs. Ramshorn would now and then look in at the noiseless door of the chamber of death, but she rightly felt her presence was not desired and though ready to help did not enter. Neither did George—not from heartlessness, but that he judged it better to leave the priests of falsehood undisturbed in the exercise of their miserable office. What did it matter how many comforting lies were told to a dying man? What *could* it matter? There was small danger of their foolish prayers and superstitious ceremonies evoking a deity from a well-ordered, self-evolved, sphericity of interacting law, where

not a pin-hole of failure afforded space out of which he might creep. No more could they deprive the poor lad of the bliss of returning into the absolute nothingness whence he had crept—to commit a horrible crime against immortal society, and creep back again with a heart full of love and remorse and self-abhorrence into the black abyss. Therefore why should he not let them tell their lies and utter their silly incantations? Aloof and unharmed he stood, safe on the shore, all ready to reach the rescuing hand to Helen, the moment she should turn her eyes to him, for the help she knew he had to give her. Certainly, for her sake, he would rather she were not left unprotected to such subtle and insinuating influences; but with the power of his mind upon her good sense, he had no fear of the result. Not that he expected her to submit at once to the wholesome regimen and plain diet he must prescribe her: the soft hand of Time must first draw together the edges of her heart's wound.

But the deadness of Helen's feelings, the heartlessness because of which she cried out against herself, seemed in a vague way, by herself unacknowledged yet felt, if not caused by, yet associated with some subtle radiation from the being of George Bascombe. That very morning when he came into the breakfast-room so quietly that she had not heard him, and, looking up, saw him unexpectedly, he seemed for a moment, she could not tell why, the dull fountain of all the miserable feeling—not of loss, but of no loss, which pressed her heart flat in her bosom. The next moment she accused herself of the grossest injustice, attributing it to the sickness of soul which the shadow of death had wrought in her; for was not George the only true friend she had ever had? If she lost him she must be lonely indeed! The feeling lingered notwithstanding, and when she thought it dispelled, began to gather again immediately.

At the same time she shrunk from Wingfold as hard and unsympathetic. True he had been most kind, even tender, to her brother, but to him he had taken a fancy, having found in him one whom he could work upon and fashion to his own liking: poor Poldie had never been one of the

strongest of men. But to her, whom he could not model after his own ideas, who required a reason for the thing any one would have her believe—to her he had shown the rough side of his nature, going farther than any gentleman ought, even if he was a clergyman, in criticising her conduct. He might well take example of her cousin George! What a different sort of artillery *he* had brought to bear upon the outstanding fortress of her convictions!

So would she say within herself, again and again, in different forms, not knowing how little of conviction there was in the conclusions she seemed to come to—how much of old habit and gratitude on the one hand, and pride and resentment upon the other. And there still was that feeling! she could not drive it away. It was like trying to disperse a fog with a fan.

The outside weather, although she was far past heeding that, was in harmony with her soul's weather. A dull dark gray fog hung from the sky, and without much obscuring the earth altogether hid the sun. The air was very cold. There was neither joy nor hope anywhere. The bushes were leafless and budless, the summer gone, the spring not worth hoping for, because it also would go: spring after spring came—for nothing but to go again! Things were so empty and wretched, that pain and grief, almost fear itself would have been welcome. The world around her, yes, all her life, all herself, was but the cold dead body of a summer-world. And Leopold was going to be buried with the summer. His smiles had all gone with the flowers. The weeds of his troubles were going also, for they would die with him. But he would not know it and be glad, any more than she, who was left caring for neither summer nor winter, joy nor sorrow, love nor hate, the past nor the future.

Many such thoughts wandered hazily through her mind as she now sat holding the hand of him who was fast sleeping away from her into death. Her eyes were fixed on the window through which he had entered that terrible night, but she saw nothing beyond it.

"He is gone," said Polwarth, in a voice that sounded unknown to the ears of Helen, and as he spoke he kneeled.

She started up with a cry, and looked in her brother's face. She had never seen any one die, yet she saw that he was dead.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE SUNSET.

HOW the terrible time, terrible for its very dulness and insensibility, passed until it brought the funeral, Helen could not have told. It seemed to her, as she looked back upon it, a bare blank, yet was the blank full of a waste weariness of heart. The days were all one, outside and inside. Her heart was but a lonely narrow bay to the sea of cold immovable fog that filled the world. No one tried to help, no one indeed knew her trouble. Every one took it for grief at the loss of her brother, while to herself it was the oppression of a life that had not even the interest of pain. The curate had of course called to inquire after her, but had not been invited to enter. George had been everywhere with help, but had no word to speak.

The day of the funeral came, in thin fog and dull cold. The few friends gathered. The body was borne to the Abbey. The curate received it at the gate in the name of the church—which takes our children in its arms, and our bodies into its garden—save indeed where her gardener is some foolish priest who knows not the heart of his mother, and will pick and choose among her dead ; the lovely words of the last-first of the apostles were read ; and earth was given back to earth, to mingle with the rest of the stuff the great workman works withal. Cold was Helen's heart, cold

her body, cold her very being. The earth, the air, the mist, the very light was cold. The past was cold, the future yet colder. She would have grudged Leopold his lonely rest in the grave, but that she had not feeling enough even for that. Her life seemed withering away from her like an autumn flower in the frosts of winter; and she, as if she had been but a flower, did not seem to care. What was life worth, when it had not strength to desire even its own continuance? Heartless she returned from the grave, careless of George's mute attentions, not even scornful of her aunt's shallow wail over the uncertainty of life and all things human,—so indifferent to the whole misery, that she walked straight up to the room, hers once more, from which the body had just been carried, and which, for so many many weary weeks, had been the centre of loving pain, sometimes agony. Once more she was at peace—but what a peace!

She took off her cloak and bonnet, laid them on the bed, went to the window, sat down, and gazed, hardly seeing, out on the cold garden with its sodden earth, its leafless shrubs, and perennial trees of darkness and mourning. The meadow lay beyond, and there she did see the red cow busily feeding, and was half-angry with her. Beyond the meadow stood the trees, with the park behind them. And yet further behind lay the hollow with the awful house in its bosom, its dismal haunted lake, and its ruined garden. But nothing moved her. She could have walked over every room in that house without a single quaver of the præcordia. Poldie was dead, but was it not well? Even if he had not been in trouble, what should his death matter? She would die soon herself and for ever: what did that or anything else matter? Might she but keep this dulness of spirit, and never more wake to weep foolish tears over an existence the whole upstanding broad-based fact of which was not worth one drop in the rivers of weeping that had been flowing ever since the joyless birth of this unconceived, ill-fated, unfathered world! To the hour of death belonged jubilation and not mourning; the hour of birth was the hour of sorrow. Back to the darkness! was the cry of a life whose very

being was an injury, only there was no one to have done the injury.

Thus she sat until she was summoned to dinner—early for the sake of the friends whose home lay at a distance. She ate and drank and took her share in the talk as matter of course, believing all at the table would judge her a heartless creature, and careless of what they might think or say. But they judged her more kindly and more truly than she judged herself. They saw through her eyes the deeps whose upward ducts were choked with the frost of an unknown despair.

No sooner was she at liberty, than again she sought her room, not consciously from love to her brother who had died there, but because the deadness of her heart chose a fitting loneliness; and again she seated herself at the window.

The dreary day was drawing to a close, and the night, drearier it could not be, was at hand. The gray had grown darker, and she sat like one waiting for the night like a monster coming to claim its own and swallow her up.

Something—was it an invasion of reviving light? caused her to lift her eyes. Away, sideways from her window, in the west, the mist had cleared a little—somewhere about the sun. Thinner and thinner it grew. No sun came forth: he was already down; but a canopy of faint amber grew visible, stretched above his tomb. It was the stuff of which sad smiles are made, not a thing that belonged to gladness. But only he who has lost his sorrow without regaining his joy, can tell how near sorrow lieth to joy. Who that has known the dull paths of listless no-feeling, would not have his sorrow back with all its attendant agonies?

The pale amber spread, dilute with light, and beneath it lay the gray of the fog, and above it the dark blue of cloud —not of sky. The soul of it was so still, so resigned, so sad, so forsaken, that she who had thought her heart gone from her, suddenly felt its wells were filling, and soon they overflowed. She wept. At what? A colour in the sky! Was there then a God that knew sadness—and was that a banner of grief he hung forth to comfort the sorrowful with sympathy? Or was it but a godless colour which the heart varnished

with its own grief? Or if the human heart came from nothing and was sad, why might not the aspects of nature come from nothing and be sad too—wrought in harmony with the unutterable woe of humanity? Then either man is the constructive centre of the world, and its meanings are but his own face looking back upon him from the mirror of his own projected atmosphere, and comfort there is none; or he is not the centre of the world, which yet carries in its forms and colours the aspects of his mind; and then, horror of horrors! is man the one conscious point and object of a vast derision—insentient nature grinning at sentient man! rose or saffron his sky, but mocks and makes mows at him; while he himself is the worst mockery of all, being at once that which mocks and that which not only is mocked but writhes in agony under the mockery. Such as Bascombe reply, they find it not so. I answer—For the best of reasons, that it is not so.

Helen's doubts did not stay her weeping, as doubt generally does; for the sky with its sweet sadness was before her, and deep in her heart a lake of tears, which, now that it had begun to flow, would not be stayed. She knew not why she wept, knew not that it was the sympathy of that pale amber of sad resignation which brought her relief; but she wept and wept, until her heart began to stir, and her tears came cooler and freer.

"Oh Poldie! my own Poldie!" she cried at length, and fell upon her knees—not to worship the sky—not to pray to Poldie, or even for Poldie—not indeed to pray at all, so far as she knew; yet I doubt if it was merely and only from the impulse of the old childish habit of saying prayers.

But in a moment she grew restless. There was no Poldie! She rose and walked about the room. And he came back to her soul, her desolate brother, clothed, alas! in the rags and tatters of all the unkind and unjust thoughts she had ever had concerning him, and wearing on his face the reflection of her worse deeds. She had stood between him and the only poor remnant of peace, consolation, and hope, that it was possible he should have; and it was through the friends whom she

had treated with such distance and uncordiality that he did receive it. Then out rushed from the chamber of her memory the vision of the small dark nervous wild-looking Indian boy, who gazed at her but for one questioning moment, then shot into her arms and nestled in her bosom. How had she justified that faith? She had received and sheltered, and shielded him, doubtless, and would have done so with her life, yet, when it came to the test, she had loved herself better than him, and would have doomed him to agony rather than herself to disgrace. Oh Poldie! Poldie! But he could not hear! Never, for evermore, should she utter to him word of sorrow or repentance! Never beg his forgiveness, or let him know that now she knew better, and had risen above such weakness and selfishness!

She stopped, and looked sadly from the window. The sky was cloudless overhead, and the amber pall was fainter and clearer over the tomb of the sun. She turned hastily to the bed where lay her cloak and bonnet, put them on with trembling hands, and went out by that same window into the garden. She could not help a shudder as she stood in the dark passage unlocking the door in the sunk fence, but the next minute she was crossing the meadow through the cold frosty twilight air, now clear of its fog, and seeming somehow to comfort, uplift and strengthen her. The red cow was still feeding there. She stopped and talked to her a little. She seemed one of Poldie's friends, and Poldie had come back to her heart if he might never more to her arms, and she was now on her way to one of his best friends, whom, as more worthy, he had loved even better than her, and whom she had not honoured as they deserved or as he must have desired. To get near them, would be to get nearer to Poldie. At least she would be with those whom he had loved, and who, she did not doubt, still loved him, believing him still alive. She could not go to the curate, but she could go to the Polwarths, no one would blame her for that—except, indeed, George. But even George should not come between her and what mere show of communion with Poldie was left her! She would keep her freedom—would rather break with

George than lose an atom of her liberty ! She would be no clay for his hands to mould after his pleasure.

She opened the door in the fence and entered the park seeming to recover strength with every step she took towards Poldie's friends ! It was almost dark when she stood at the lodge-door and knocked.

CHAPTER XCIII.

AN HONEST SPY.

NO one answered Helen's knock. She repeated it, and still no answer came. Her heart might have failed her, but that she heard voices; what if they were talking about Leopold? At length, after knocking four or five times, she heard the step as of a child coming down a stair; but it passed the door. Clearly no one had heard her. She knocked yet again, and immediately it was opened by Rachel. The pleasured surprise that shone up in her face when she saw who it was that stood without, was lovely to see, and Helen, on whose miserable isolation it came like a sunrise of humanity, took no counsel with pride, but, in simple gratitude for the voiceless yet eloquent welcome, bent down and kissed her. The little arms were flung about her neck, and the kiss returned with such a gentle warmth and restrained sweetness as would have satisfied the most fastidious in the matter of salute—to which class, however, Helen did not belong, for she seldom kissed any one. Then Rachel took her by the hand and led her into the kitchen, placed a chair for her near the fire, and said,

"I *am* sorry there is no fire in the parlour. The gentlemen are in my uncle's room. Oh, Miss Lingard, I do wish you could have heard how they have been talking!"

"Have they been saying anything about my brother?" asked Helen.

"It's all about him," she replied.

"May I ask who the gentlemen are?" said Helen doubtfully.

"Mr. Wingfold and Mr. Drew. They are often here."

"Is it—do you mean Mr. Drew the draper?"

"Yes. He is one of Mr. Wingfold's best pupils. He brought him to my uncle, and he has come often ever since."

"I never heard that—Mr. Wingfold—took pupils.—I am afraid I do not quite understand you."

"I would have said *disciples*," returned Rachel smiling; "but that has grown to feel such a sacred word—as if it belonged only to the Master, that I didn't like to use it. It would say best what I mean though; for there are people in Glaston that are actually mending their ways because of Mr. Wingfold's teaching, and Mr. Drew was the first of them. It is long since such a thing was heard of in the Abbey. It never was in my time."

Helen sighed. She wished it had remained possible for her also to become one of Mr. Wingfold's pupils, but how could she now when she had learned that what he had to teach was at best but a lovely phantasm, sprung of the seething together of the conscience and imagination. George could give account of the whole matter: religion invariably excited the imagination and weakened the conscience;—witness the innumerable tales concerning Jesus invented in the first of the Christian centuries, and about this and that saint in those that followed! Helen's experience in Leopold's case had certainly been different, but the other fact remained. Alas, she could not be a pupil of Mr. Wingfold! She could no longer deceive herself with such comfort. And yet!—*Come unto me, and I will give you rest.*

"I do wish I could hear them," she said.

"And why not?" returned Rachel. "There is not one of them would not be glad to see you. I know that."

"I am afraid I should hinder their talk. Would they

speak just as freely as if I were not there? Not that I know why they shouldn't," she added; "only the presence of any stranger—"

"You are no stranger to Mr. Wingfold or my uncle," said Rachel, "and I daresay you know Mr. Drew?"

"To tell you the truth, Miss Polwarth, I have not behaved as I should either to your uncle or Mr. Wingfold. I know it now that my brother is gone. They were so good to him! I feel now as if I had been possessed with an evil spirit. I could not bear them to be more to him than I was. Oh, how I should like to hear what they are saying! I feel as if I should get a glimpse of Leopold—almost, if I might. But I couldn't face them altogether. I could not go into the room."

Rachel was silent for a moment, thinking. Then she said:

"I'll tell you what then: there's no occasion. Between my uncle's room and mine there's a little closet, where you shall sit and hear every word. Nothing will divide you from them but a few thin old boards."

"That would hardly be honourable though—would it?"

"I will answer for it. I shall tell my uncle afterwards. There may be cases where the motive makes the right or the wrong. It's not as if you were listening to find out secrets. I shall be in the room, and that will be a connecting link, you know: they never turn me out. Come now. We don't know what we may be losing."

The desire to hear Leopold's best friends talk about him was strong in Helen, but her heart misgave her: was it not unbecoming? She would be in terror of discovery all the time. In the middle of the stair, she drew Rachel back and whispered,

"I dare not do it."

"Come on," said Rachel. "Hear what I shall say to them first. After that you shall do as you please."

Evidently so quick was her response, her thoughts had been going in the same direction as Helen's.

"Thank you for trusting me," she added, as Helen again followed her.

Arrived at the top, the one stood trembling, while the other went into the room.

"Uncle," said Rachel, "I have a friend in the house who is very anxious to hear you and our friends speak your minds to each other, but for reasons does not wish to appear: will you allow my friend to listen without being seen?"

"Is it your wish, Rachel, or are you only conveying the request of another?" asked her uncle.

"It is my wish," answered Rachel. "I really desire it—if you do not mind."

She looked from one to another as she spoke. The curate and the draper indicated a full acquiescence.

"Do you quite know what you are about, Rachel?" asked Polwarth.

"Perfectly, uncle," she answered. "There is no reason why you should not talk as freely as if you were talking only to me. I will put my friend in the closet, and you need never think that any one is in the house but ourselves."

"Then I have no more to say," returned her uncle with a smile. "Your *friend*, whoever he or she may be, is heartily welcome."

Rachel rejoined Helen, who had already drawn nearer to the door of the closet, and now seated herself right willingly in its shelter, amidst an atmosphere odorous of apples and herbs. Already the talk was going on just as before. At first each of the talkers did now and then remember there was a listener unseen, but found, when the conversation came to a close, that he had for a long time forgotten it.

CHAPTER XCIV.

WHAT HELEN HEARD.

ALTHOUGH satisfied that, after what Rachel had said to the men, there could be no impropriety in her making use of the privilege granted her, Helen felt oddly uncomfortable at first. But soon the fancy came, that she was listening at the door of the other world to catch news of her Leopold, and that made her forget herself and put her at peace. For some time, however, the conversation was absolutely unintelligible to her. She understood the words and phrases, and even some of the sentences, but as she had no clew to their drift, the effort to understand was like attempting to realise the span of a rainbow from a foot or two of it appearing now and then in different parts and vanishing again at once. It was chiefly Polwarth, often Wingfold, and now and then Drew that spoke, Rachel contributing only an occasional word. At length broke something of a dawn over the seeming chaos. The words from which the light that first reached Helen flowed, were the draper's.

"I can't think, for all that," he said, "why, if there be life beyond the grave, and most sincerely I trust there is—I don't see why we should know so little about it. Confess now, Mr. Polwarth !—Mr. Wingfold !" he said appealingly, "—does it not seem strange that, if our dearest friends go on living somewhere else, they should, the moment they

cease to breathe, pass away from us utterly—so utterly that from that moment neither hint nor trace nor sign of their existence ever reaches us? Nature, the Bible, God himself says nothing about how they exist or where they are, or why they are so silent—cruelly silent if it be in their power to speak,—therefore they cannot; and here we are left not only with aching hearts but wavering faith, not knowing whither to turn to escape the stare of the awful blank, that seems in the very intensity of its silence to shout in our ears that we are but dust and return to the dust!"

The gate-keeper and curate interchanged a pleased look of surprise at the draper's eloquence, but Polwarth instantly took up his answer.

"I grant you it would be strange, indeed, if there were no good reason for it," he said.

"Then do you say," asked Wingfold, "that until we see, discover, or devise some good reason for the darkness that overhangs it, we are at liberty to remain in doubt as to whether there be any life within the cloud?"

"I would say so," answered Polwarth, "were it not that we have the story of Jesus, which, if we accept it, is surely enough to satisfy us both as to the thing itself, and as to the existence of a good reason, whether we have found one or not, for the mystery that overshadows it."

"Still I presume we are not forbidden to seek such a reason," said the curate.

The draper was glancing from the one to the other with evident anxiety.

"Certainly not," returned the gate-keeper. "For what else is our imagination given us but the discovery of good reasons that are, or the invention of good reasons that may perhaps be?"

"Can you then imagine any good reason," said Drew, "why we should be kept in such absolute ignorance of everything that befalls the parted spirit from the moment it quits its house with us?"

"I think I know one," answered Polwarth. "I have sometimes fancied it might be because no true idea of their

condition could possibly be grasped by those who remain in the tabernacle of the body; that to know their state it is necessary that we also should be clothed in our new bodies, which are to the old as a house to a tent. I doubt if we have any words in which the new facts could be imparted to our knowledge, the facts themselves being beyond the reach of any senses whereof we are now in actual possession. I expect to find my new body provided with new, I mean *other* senses beyond what I now possess: many more may be required to bring us into relation with all the facts in himself which God may have shadowed forth in properties, as we say, of what we call matter? The spaces all around us, even to those betwixt star and star, may be the home of the multitudes of the heavenly host, yet seemingly empty to all who have but our provision of senses. But I do not care to dwell upon that kind of speculation. It belongs to a lower region, upon which I grudge to expend interest while the far loftier one invites me, where if I gather not the special barley of which I am in search, I am sure to come upon the finest of wheat.—Well, then, for my reason: There are a thousand individual events in the course of every man's life, by which God takes a hold of him—a thousand breaches by which he would and does enter, little as the man may know it; but there is one universal and unchanging grasp he keeps upon the race, yet not as the race, for the grasp is upon every solitary single individual that has a part in it: that grasp is—death in its mystery. To whom can the man who is about to die in absolute loneliness and go he cannot tell whither, flee for refuge from the doubts and fears that assail him, but to the Father of his being?"

"But," said Drew, "I cannot see what harm would come of letting us know a little—as much at least as might serve to assure us that there was more of *something* on the other side."

"Just this," returned Polwarth, "that, their fears allayed, their hopes encouraged from any lower quarter, men would, as usual, turn away from the fountain to the cistern of life, from the ever fresh original creative Love to that drawn off and shut in. That there are thousands who would forget

God if they could but be assured of such a tolerable state of things beyond the grave as even this wherein we now live, is plainly to be anticipated from the fact that the doubts of so many in respect of religion concentrate themselves now-a-days upon the question whether there is any life beyond the grave; a question which, although no doubt nearly associated with religion,—as what question worth asking is not?—does not immediately belong to religion at all. Satisfy such people, if you can, that they shall live, and what have they gained? A little comfort perhaps—but a comfort not from the highest source, and possibly gained too soon for their well-being. Does it bring them any nearer to God than they were before? Is he filling one cranny more of their hearts in consequence? Their assurance of immortality has not come from a knowledge of him, and without him it is worse than worthless. Little indeed has been gained, and that with the loss of much. The word applies here which our Lord in His parable puts in the mouth of Abraham: *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.* He does not say they would not believe in a future state though one rose from the dead—although most likely they would soon persuade themselves that the apparition after all was only an illusion—* but that they would not be persuaded to repent, though one rose from the dead; and without that, what great matter whether they believed in a future state or not? It would only be the worse for them if they did. No, Mr. Drew! I repeat, it is not a belief in immortality that will deliver a man from the woes of humanity, but faith in the God of life, the Father of lights, the God of all consolation and comfort. Believing in him, a man can leave his friends, and their and his own immortality, with everything else—even his and their love and perfection, with utter confidence in his hands. Until we have the life in us, we shall never be at peace. The living God dwelling in the heart he has made, and glorifying it by inmost speech with himself—that is life, assurance and safety. Nothing less is or can be such."

* See Lynch's admirable sermon on this subject.

CHAPTER XCV.

WHAT HELEN HEARD MORE.

"A WORD you dropped the other day," said the curate, "set me thinking of the noteworthy fact that belief in God and belief in immortality cease together. But I do not see the logic of it. If we are here without God, why may we not go on there without God? I marvel that I have heard of no one taking up and advocating the view. What a grand discovery it would be for some people—that not only was there no God to interfere with them, and insist on their becoming something worth being, but that they were immortal notwithstanding! that death was only the passage of another birth into a condition of enlarged capacity for such bliss as they enjoyed here, but more exalted in degree, perhaps in kind, and altogether preferable."

"I know one to whom the thought would not have been a new one," said Polwarth. "Have you not come upon a passage in my brother's manuscript involving the very idea?"

"Not yet. I read very slowly and pick up all the crumbs. I wish we had had the book here. I should have so much liked to hear you read from it again."

The gate-keeper rose and went to his cabinet.

"The wish is easily gratified," he said. "I made a copy of it,—partly for security, partly that I might thoroughly enter into my brother's thoughts."

"I wonder almost you lend the original then," said Wingfold.

"I certainly could not lend the copy to any man I could not trust with the original," answered Polwarth. "But I never lent either before."—He was turning over the leaves as he spoke.—"The passage," he went on, "besides for its own worth, is precious to me as showing how, through all his madness, his thoughts haunted the gates of wisdom.—Ah! here it is!

"'About this time I had another strange vision, whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell. I thought, as oftener than once before, that at length I was dying. And it seemed to me that I did die and awake to the consciousness of a blessed freedom from the coarser and more ponderous outer dress I had hitherto worn, being now clad only in what had been up to this time an inner garment, and was a far more closely fitting one. The first delight of which I was aware was coolness—a coolness that hurt me not—the coolness as of a dewy summer eve, in which a soft friendly wind is blowing; and the coolness was that of perfect well-being, of the health that cometh after fever, when a sound sleep hath divided it away and built a rampart between; the coolness of undoubted truth, and of love that hath surmounted passion and is tenfold love.'

"He goes on to give further and fuller account of his sensations,—ventures even on the anticipated futility of an attempt to convey a notion of one of his new senses. I leave all that for your own reading, Mr. Wingfold.

"'But where was I? That I could not tell. *I am here* was all I could say; but then what more could I ever have said?—Gradually my sight came to me, or the light of the country arose, I could not tell which, and behold, I was in the midst of a paradise, gorgeous yet gracious, to describe which I find no words in the halting tongues of earth, and I know something of them all, most of them well. If I say a purple sea was breaking in light on an emerald shore, the moment the words are written, I see them coarse and crude as a boy's first attempt at landscape; yet are there no better

wherewith to tell what first filled my eyes with heavenly delight. . . . .

"'The inhabitants were many, but nowhere were they crowded. There was room in abundance and wild places seemed to be held sacred for solitude.'

"I am only picking up a sentence here and there as I hasten to the particular point," said Polwarth, looking down the page.

"'But the flowers! and the birds! and above all the beauty of the people! and they dwelt in harmony. Yet on their foreheads lay as it seemed a faint mist, or as it were the first of a cloud of coming disquiet.

. . . . . .

"'And I prayed him, Tell me, sir, whither shall I go to find God and say unto him, Lo, here I am! And he answered and said to me, Sir, I but dimly know what thou meanest. Say further. And I stood for an hour, even as one astonished. Then said I, All my long life on the world whence I came, I did look to find God when death should take me. But lo, now—— And with that my heart smote me, for in my former life I had oftentimes fallen into unbelief and denied God: was this now my punishment—that I should never find him? And my heart grew cold in my body, and the blood curdled therein. Then the man answered and said, It is true that in generations past, for so I read in our ancient books, men did believe in one above them and in them, who had wrought them to that they were, and was working them to better still; but whether it be that we have now gained that better, and there is nothing higher unto which we may look, therefore no need of the high one, I know not, but truly we have long ceased so to believe, and have learned that as things are, so they have been, and so they shall be. Then fell as it were a cold stone into the core of my heart, and I questioned him no farther, for I bore death in my heart, even as a woman carrieth her unborn child. No God! I cried, and sped away into a solitude, and shrieked aloud. No God! Nay, but ere I believe it, I will search through all creation, and cry aloud as I go. I will

search until I find him, and if I find him not,——. With that my soul would have fainted in me, had I not spread forth my wings and rushed aloft to find him.

. . . . . .

"'For the more lovely anything I saw, the more gracious in colour or form, or the more marvellous in the law of its working, ever a fresh pang shot to my heart: if that which I had heard should prove true, then was there no Love such as seemed to me to dwell therein, the soul of its beauty, and all the excellence thereof, was but a delusion of my own heart, greedy after a phantom-perfection. No God! no Love! no loveliness, save a ghastly semblance thereof! and the more ghastly, that it was so like loveliness and yet was not to be loved upon peril of prostitution of spirit. Then in truth was heaven a fable, and hell an all-embracing fact. For my very being knew in itself that if it would dwell in peace, the very atmosphere in which it lived and moved and breathed must be love, living love, a one divine presence, truth to itself, and love to me, and to all them that needed love, down to the poorest that can but need it, and knoweth it not when it cometh. I knew that if love was not all in all, in fact as well as in imagination, my life was but a dreary hollow made in the shape of a life, and therefore for ever hungry and never to be satisfied. And again I spread wings —no longer as it seemed of hope, but wings of despair, yet mighty, and flew. And I learned thereafter that despair is but the hidden side of hope.'

"Here follow pages of his wanderings in quest of God. He tells how and where he inquired and sought, searching into the near and minute as earnestly as into the far and vast, watching at the very pores of being, and sitting in the gates of the mighty halls of assembly—but all in vain. No God was to be found.

"'And it seemed to me,' he says at last, 'that, as I had been the wanderer of earth, so was I now doomed to be the wanderer of heaven. On earth I wandered to find death, and men called me the everlasting Jew; in heaven I wandered to find God, and what name would they give me now? . . . . .

"'At last my heart sank within me wholly, and I folded my wings and through years I also sank and sank, and alighted at length upon the place appointed for my habitation —that namely wherein I found myself first after death. And alighting there, I fell down weary and slept.

"'And when I woke I turned upon my side in the despair of a life that was neither in my own power nor in that of one who was the Father of me, which life therefore was an evil thing and a tyrant unto me. And lo! there by my side I beheld a lily of the field such as grew on the wayside in the old times betwixt Jerusalem and Bethany. Never since my death had I seen such, and my heart awoke within me, and I wept bitter tears that nothing should be true, nothing be that which it had seemed in the times of old. And as I wept I heard a sound as of the falling of many tears, and I looked, and lo a shower as from a watering-pot falling upon the lily! And I looked yet again, and I saw the watering-pot, and the hand that held it; and he whose hand held the pot stood by me, and looked at me as he watered the lily. He was a man like the men of the world where such lilies grow, and was poorly dressed, and seemed like a gardener. And I looked up in his face, and lo—the eyes of the Lord Jesus! And my heart swelled until it filled my whole body and my head, and I gave a great cry, and for joy that turned into agony I could not rise, neither could I speak, but I crept on my hands and my knees to his feet, and there I fell down upon my face, and with my hands I lifted one of his feet and did place it upon my head, and then I found voice to cry, O master! and therewith the life departed from me. And when I came to myself, the master sat under the tree, and I lay by his side, and he had lifted my head upon his knees. And behold, the world was jubilant around me, for Love was Love and Lord of all. The sea roared, and the fulness thereof was love; and the purple and the gold and the blue and the green came straight from the hidden red heart of the Lord Jesus. And I closed my eyes for very bliss; nor had I yet bethought me of the time when first those eyes looked upon me, for I seemed to have known them since first I began to

be. But now when for very bliss I closed my eyes, my sin came back to me, and I remembered And I rose up, and kneeled down before him, and said, O Lord, I am Ahasuerus, the Jew, the man who would not let thee rest thy cross upon the stone before my workshop, but drave thee from it.—Say no more of that, answered my Lord, for truly I have myself rested in thy heart, cross and all, until the thing thou didst in thy ignorance is better than forgotten, for it is remembered in love. Only see thou also make right excuse for my brethren who, like thee then, know not now what they do. Come and I will bring thee to the woman who died for thee in the burning fire. And I said, O Lord leave me not, for although I would now in my turn right gladly die for her, yet would I not look upon that woman again if the love of her would make me love thee one hair the less—thou knowest. And the Lord smiled upon me and said, Fear not, Ahasuerus ; my love infolds and is the nest of all love. I fear not ; fear thou not either. And I arose and followed him. And every tree and flower, yea every stone and cloud, with the whole earth and sea and air, were full of God, even the living God—so that now I could have died of pure content. And I followed my Lord. . . . .'"

The gate-keeper was silent, and so were they all. At length Rachel rose softly, wiping the tears from her eyes, and left the room. But she found no one in the closet. Helen was already hastening across the park, weeping as she went.

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE CURATE'S RESOLVE.

THE next day was Sunday.

Twelve months had not yet elapsed since the small events with which my narrative opened. The change which had passed, not merely upon the opinions, but in the heart and mind and very being of the curate, had not then begun to appear even to himself, although its roots were not only deep in him but deep beyond him, even in the source of him ; and now he was in a state of mind, a state of being, rather, of whose nature at that time he had not, and could not have had, the faintest fore-feeling, the most shadowy conception. It had been a season of great trouble, but the gain had been infinitely greater ; for now were the bonds of the finite broken, he had burst the shell of the mortal, and was of those over whom the second death hath no power. The agony of the second birth was past, and he was a child again—only a child, he knew, but a child of the kingdom ; and the world, and all that God cared about in it, was his, as no miser's gold could ever belong to its hoarder, while the created universe, yea and the uncreated also whence it sprung, lay open to him in the boundless free giving of the original Thought. "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's :" he understood the words even as he who said them understood them, and as the wise of this world

never will understand them until first they become fools that they may be wise.

At the same time a great sorrow threatened him from the no less mysterious region of his relations to humanity; but if that region and its most inexplicable cares were beyond the rule of the Life that dwelt in him, then was that Life no true God, and the whole thing was false; for he loved Helen with a love that was no invention or creation of his own, and if not his, then whose? Certainly not of one who, when it threatened to overwhelm him, was unable to uphold him under it! This thing also belonged to the God of his being. A poor God must he be for men or women who did not care about the awful things involved in the relation between them! Therefore even in his worst anxieties about Helen,—I do not mean in his worst seasons of despair at the thought of never gaining her love—he had never yet indeed consciously regarded the winning of her as a possibility—but at those times when he most plainly saw her the submissive disciple of George Bascombe, and the two seemed to his fancy to be straying away together "into a wide field, full of dark mountains;" when he saw her, so capable of the noblest submitting her mind to the entrance of the poorest, meanest, shabbiest theories of life, and taking for her guide one who could lead her to no conscious well-being, or make provision for sustainment when the time of suffering and anxiety should come, or the time of health and strength be over when yet she must live on; when he saw her adopting a system of things whose influence would shrivel up instead of developing her faculties, crush her imagination with such a mountain weight as was never piled above Titian, and dwarf the whole divine woman within her to the size and condition of an Aztec—even then was he able to reason with himself: "She belongs to God, not to me; and God loves her better than ever I could love her. If she should set out with her blind guide, it will be but a first day's journey she will go—through marshy places and dry sands, across the far breadth of which lo! the blue mountains that shelter the high vales of sweetness and peace." And with this he not only tried

to comfort himself, but succeeded—I do not say to contentment, but to quiet. Contentment, which, whatever its immediate shape, to be contentment at all, must be the will of God, lay beyond. Alas that men cannot believe there is such a thing as "that good and acceptable and perfect will of God!" To those that do believe it, it is the rejoicing of a conscious deliverance.

And now this Sunday, Wingfold entered the pulpit, prepared at last to utter his resolve. Happily nothing had been done to introduce the confusing element of another will. The bishop had heard nothing of the matter, and if anything had reached the rector he had not spoken. Not one of the congregation, not even Mrs. Ramshorn, had hinted to him that he ought to resign. It had been left altogether with himself. And now he would tell them the decision to which the thought he had taken had conducted him. I will give a portion of his sermon—enough to show us how he showed the congregation the state of his mind in reference to the grand question, and the position he took in relation to his hearers.

"It is time, my hearers," he said, "because it is now possible to bring to a close that uncertainty with regard to the continuance of our relation to each other, which I was, in the spring-time of the year, compelled by mental circumstance to occasion. I then forced myself, for very dread of the honesty of an all-knowing God, to break through every convention of the church and pulpit, and speak to you of my most private affairs. I told you that I was sure of not one of those things concerning which it is taken for granted that a clergyman must be satisfied; but that I would not at once yield my office, lest in that act I should seem to declare unbelief of many a thing which even then I desired to find true. In leaving me undisturbed either by complaint, expostulation, or proffered instruction, you, my hearers, have granted me the leisure of which I stood in need. Meantime I have endeavoured to show you the best I saw, while yet I dared not say I was sure of anything. I have thus kept you, those at least who cared to follow my path, acquainted with

my mental history. And now I come to tell you the practical result at which I have arrived.

"But when I say that I will not forsake my curacy, still less my right and duty to teach whatever I seem to know, I must not therein convey the impression that I have attained that conviction and assurance the discovery of the absence of which was the cause of the whole uncertain proceeding. All I now say is, that in the story of Jesus I have beheld such grandeur—to me apparently altogether beyond the reach of human invention, such a radiation of divine loveliness and truth, such hope for man, soaring miles above every possible pitfall of Fate; and have at the same time, from the endeavour to obey the word recorded as his, experienced such a conscious enlargement of mental faculty, such a deepening of moral strength, such an enhancement of ideal, such an increase of faith, hope, and charity towards all men, that I now declare with the consent of my whole man—I cast in my lot with the servants of the Crucified; I am content even to share their delusion, if delusion it be, for it is the truth of the God of men to me; I will stand or fall with the story of my Lord; I will take my chance—I speak not in irreverence but in honesty—my chance of failure or success in regard to whatever may follow in this life or the life to come, if there be a life to come—on the words and will of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom if, impressed as I am with the truth of his nature, the absolute devotion of his life, and the essential might of his being, I yet obey not, I shall not only deserve to perish but in that very refusal draw ruin upon my head. Before God I say it—I would rather be crucified with that man, so it might be as a disciple and not as a thief that creeps, intrudes, or climbs into the fold, than I would reign with him over such a kingdom of grandeur as would have satisfied the imagination and love-ambition of his mother. On such grounds as these I hope I am justified in declaring myself a disciple of the Son of Man, and in devoting my life and the renewed energy and enlarged, yea infinite hope which he has given me, to his brothers and sisters of my race, that if possible I may gain some to be

partakers of the blessedness of my hope. Henceforth I am not *in holy orders*, I reject the phrase in all its professional vulgarity, but *under* holy orders, even the orders of Christ Jesus, which is the law of liberty, the law whose obedience alone can set a man free from in-burrowing slavery.

"And if any man yet say that, because of my lack of absolute assurance, I have no right to the sacred post,—Let him, I answer, who has been assailed by such doubts as mine, and from the citadel of his faith sees no more one lingering shadow of a foe—let him cast at me the first stone! Vain challenge! for such an one will never cast stone at man or woman. But let not him whose belief is but the absence of doubt, who has never loved enough that which he thinks he believes to have felt a single fear lest it should not be true—let not that man, I say, cast at me pebble from the brook, or cloven rock from the mount of the law, for either will fall hurtless at my feet. Friends, I have for the last time spoken of myself in this place. Ye have borne with me in my trials, and I thank you. Those who have not only borne but suffered, and do now rejoice with me, I thank tenfold. I have done—

"Save for one word to the Christians of this congregation:

"The waves of infidelity are coming in with a strong wind and a flowing tide. Who is to blame? God it cannot be, and for unbelievers, they are as they were. It is the Christians who are to blame. I do not mean those who are called Christians, but those who call and count themselves Christians. I tell you, and I speak to each one of whom it is true, that you hold and present such a withered, starved, miserable, death's-head idea of Christianity; that you are yourself such poverty-stricken believers, if believers you are at all; that the notion you present to the world as your ideal, is so common-place, so false to the grand, gracious, mighty-hearted Jesus—that *you* are the cause why the truth hangs its head in patience, and rides not forth on the white horse, conquering and to conquer. You dull its lustre in the eyes of men; you deform its fair proportions; you represent not

that which it is, but that which it is not, yet call yourselves by its name; you are not the salt of the earth, but a salt that has lost its savour, for ye seek all things else first, and to that seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness shall never be added. Until you repent and believe afresh, believe in a nobler Christ, namely the Christ revealed by himself, and not the muffled form of something vaguely human and certainly not all divine, which the false interpretations of men have substituted for him, you will be as, I repeat you are, the main reason why faith is so scanty in the earth, and the enemy comes in like a flood. For the sake of the progress of the truth, and that into nobler minds than yours, it were better you joined the ranks of the enemy, and declared what I fear with many of you is the fact, that you believe not at all. But whether in some sense you believe or not, the fact remains, that, while you are not of those Christians who obey the word of the master, *doing* the things he says to them, you are of those Christians, if you *will* be called by the name, to whom he will say, *I never knew you: go forth into the outer darkness.* Then, at least, will the church be rid of you, and the honest doubter will have room to breathe the divine air of the presence of Jesus.

"But oh what unspeakable bliss of heart and soul and mind and sense remains for him who like St. Paul is crucified with Christ, who lives no more from his own self, but is inspired and informed and possessed with the same faith towards the Father in which Jesus lived and wrought the will of the Father! If the words attributed to Jesus are indeed the words of him whom Jesus declared himself, then truly is the fate of mankind a glorious one,—and that, first and last, because men have a God supremely grand, all-perfect in God-head; for that is, and that alone can be, the absolute bliss of the created."

CHAPTER XCVII.

HELEN AWAKE.

THAT Sunday-dinner was a very quiet meal. An old friend of Mrs. Ramshorn, a lady-ecclesiastic like herself, dined with them : what the two may have said to each other in secret conclave, I cannot tell, but not a word of remark upon Mr. Wingfold or his sermon was heard at table.

As she was leaving the room, Bascombe whispered Helen to put on something and come to him in the garden. Helen glanced at the window as if doubtful. It was cold, but the sun was shining ; the weather had nothing to do with it ; she had but taken a moment to think. She pressed her lips together—and consented. George saw she would rather not go, but he set it down to a sisterly unwillingness to enjoy herself when her brother could no longer behold the sun, and such mere sentiment must not be encouraged.

When the cypresses and box-trees had come betwixt them and the house, he offered his arm, but Helen preferred being free. She did not refuse to go into the summer-house with him ; but she took her place on the opposite side of the little table. George however spied no hint of approaching doom.

" I am sorry to have to alter my opinion of that curate," he said, as he seated himself. " There was so much in him that I took to promise well. But old habit, the necessities of

existence, and the fear of society have been too much for him—as they will always be for most men. He has succumbed at last, and I am sorry! I did think he was going to turn out an honest man!"

"And you have come to the certain conclusion that he is not an honest man, George?"

"Assuredly."

"Why?"

"Because he goes on to teach what he confesses he is not sure about."

"He professes to be sure that it is better than anything he is sure about.—You teach me there is no God; are you absolutely certain there is not?"

"Yes; absolutely certain."

"On what grounds?"

"On grounds I have set forth to you twenty times, Helen, dear," answered George a little impatiently. "I am not inclined to talk about them now.—I can no more believe in a god than in a dragon."

"And yet a dragon was believable to the poets that made our old ballads; and now geology reveals that some such creatures did at one time actually exist."

"Ah! you turn the tables on me there, Helen! I confess my parallel a false one."

"A truer one than you think, perhaps," said Helen. "That a thing should seem absurd to one man, or to a thousand men, will not make it absurd in its own nature; and men as good and as clever as you, George, have in all ages believed in a God. Only their notion of God may have been different from yours. Perhaps their notion was a believable one, while yours is not."

"By Jove, Helen! you've got on with your logic. I feel quite flattered! So far as I am aware you have had no tutor in that branch but myself! You'll soon be too much for your master, by Jove!"

Like the pied piper, Helen smiled a little smile. But she said seriously,

"Well, George, all I have to suggest is—What if, after all

your inability to believe it, things should at last prove, even to your—satisfaction, shall I say?—that there *is* a God?"

"Don't trouble yourself a bit about it, Helen," returned George, whose mind was full of something else, to introduce which he was anxiously and heedlessly clearing the way; "I am prepared to take my chance, and all I care about is whether you will take your chance with me. Helen, I love you with my whole soul."

"Oh! you have a soul then, George? I thought you hadn't!"

"It *is* a foolish form of speech, no doubt," returned Bascombe, a little disconcerted, as was natural. But to be serious, Helen, I do love you."

"How long will you love me if I tell you I don't love you?"

"Really, Helen, I don't see how to answer such a question. I don't understand you at all to-day! Have I offended you? I am very sorry if I have, but I am quite in the dark as to when or where or how."

"Tell me then," said Helen, heedless of his evident annoyance and discomfort, "how long will you love me if I love you in return?"

"For ever and ever."

"Another form of speech?"

"You know what I mean, well enough. I shall love you as long as I live."

"George, I never could love a man who believed I was going to die for ever."

"But, Helen," pleaded Bascombe, "if it can't be helped, you know!"

"But you are content it should be so. You believe it willingly. You scoff at any hint of a possible immortality."

"Well, but, Helen, what difference can it make between you and me?" returned George, whom the danger of losing her had rendered for the moment indifferent even to his most cherished theory. "If there should be anything afterwards, of course I should go on loving you to the very extreme of the possible."

"While now you don't love me enough to wish I may live and not die! Leaving that out of view, however, it makes all the difference to the love I should have to expect of you It may be only a whim—I can prove nothing any more than you—but I have a—whim then—to be loved as an immortal woman, the child of a living God, and not as a helpless bastard of Nature! I beg your pardon—I forget my manners."

That a lady should utter such a word!—and that lady Helen!—George was shocked. Coming on the rest, it absolutely bewildered him. He sat silent perforce, Helen saw it and yielded to a moment's annoyance with herself, but presently resumed:

"I have given you the advantage, George, and wronged myself. But I don't care *much*. I shall only take the better courage to speak my mind.—You come asking me to love you, and my brother lying mouldering in the earth—all there is of him, you tell me! If you believed he was alive still, and I should find him again some day, there would be no reason why you should not speak of love even now; for where does any one need love more than at the brink of the grave? But to come talking of love to me, with the same voice that has but just been teaching me that the grave is the end of all, and my brother gone down into it for ever—I tell you, cousin—I must say it—it seems to me hardly decent. For me at least—I will *not* be loved with the love that can calmly accept such a fate. And I will never love any man, believing that, if I outlive him, my love must thereafter be but a homeless torent, falling ever into a bottomless abyss. Why should I make of my heart a roaring furnace of regrets and self accusations? The memory of my brother is for me enough. Let me keep what freedom is possible to me; let me rather live the life of a cold-blooded animal, and die in the ice that gathers about me. But before I sit down to await such an end, I shall know whether I am indeed compelled to believe as you do that there is no God, that Death is my lord and master, that he will take me as he has taken my brother and yet I shall never see him more. No, cousin

George, I need a God ; and if there be none how did I come to need one? Yes, I know you think you can explain it all, but the way you account for it is just as miserable as what you would put in its place. I am not complete in myself like you. I am not able to live without a God. I will seek him until I find him, or drop into the abyss where all question and answer ceases. Then in the end I shall be no worse than you would have me at the beginning—no, it will be nothing so bad, for then I shall not know my misery as you would have me know it now. If we are creatures of nothing, in spite of all the outcry of our souls against that fate, what mighty matter is it if, thus utterly befooled of Nature, we should also a little fool ourselves, by believing in a lovely hope that looks like a promise, and seems as if it ought to be true? How can a devotion to the facts of her existence be required of one whose nature has been proved to her a lie?—You speak from the facts of your nature, George ; I speak from the facts of mine."

Helen had come awake at last! It would have suited George better had she remained a half-quickened statue, responsive only to himself, her not over-potent Pygmalion. He sat speechless—with his eyes fixed on her.

"You need no God," she went on, "therefore you seek none. If you need none, you are right to seek none, I dare say. But I need a God—oh, I cannot tell how I need him, if he be to be found! and by the same reasoning I will give my life to the search for him. To the last I will go on seeking him, for if once I give in, and confess there is no God, I shall go mad—mad, and perhaps kill somebody like poor Poldie. George, I have said my say. I would not have come into the garden but to say it. Good-bye."

As she spoke she rose and held out her hand to him. But in the tumult of more emotions than I can well name—amongst the rest indignation, dismay, disappointment, pride, and chagrin, he lost himself while searching in vain for words, paid no heed to her movement, and lifted no hand to take that she offered. With head erect she walked from the summer-house.

"The love of a life-time!—a sweet invitation!" she said to herself, as with the slow step of restrained wrath she went up the garden.

George sat for some minutes as she had left him. Then he broke the silence in his own ears and said,

"Well, I'm damned!"

And so he was—for the time—and a very good thing too, for he required it.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

THOU DIDST NOT LEAVE.

THE next day the curate found himself so ill at ease, from the reaction after excitement of various kinds, that he determined to give himself a holiday. His notion of a holiday was a very simple one: a day in a deep wood, if such could be had, with a volume fit for alternate reading and pocketing as he might feel inclined. Of late no volume had been his companion in any wanderings but his New Testament.

There was a remnant of real old-fashioned forest on the Lythe, some distance up: thither he went by the road, the shortest way, to return by the winding course of the stream. It was a beautiful day of St. Martin's summer. In the forest, if the leaves were gone, there was the more light, and sun and shadow played many a lovely game. But he saw them as though he saw them not, for fear and hope struggled in his heart, and for a long time prayer itself could not atone them. At length, a calm fell, and he set out to return home, down the bank of the river.

Many-hued and many-shaped had been the thoughts, not that came to him from the forest, but that he had carried thither with him: through all and each of them, ever and again had come dawning the face of Helen, as he had seen it in church the day before, where she sat between

her aunt and her cousin, so unlike either. For, to their annoyance, she had insisted on going to church, and to hers that had refused to let her go alone. And in her face the curate had seen something he had never seen there until then,—a wistful look, as if now she would be glad to pick up any suitable crumb to carry home with her. In that dawn of coming childhood, though he dared not yet altogether believe it such, the hard contemptuous expression of Bascombe's countenance, and the severe disapproval in Mrs. Ramshorn's, were entirely lost upon him.

All the way down the river, the sweet change haunted him. When he got into the park, and reached that hollow betwixt the steep ferny slopes where he sat on the day with which my narrative opens, he seated himself again on the same stone, and reviewed the past twelve months. This was much such a day as that, only the hour was different : it was the setting sun that now shone upon the ferns, and cast shadows from them big enough for oaks. What a change had passed upon him ! That day the New Testament had been the book of the church—this day it was a fountain of living waters to the man Thomas Wingfold. He had not opened his Horace for six months. Great trouble he had had ; both that and its results were precious. Now a new trouble had come, but that also was a form of life : he would rather love and suffer and love still, a thousand times rather, than return to the poverty of not knowing Helen Lingard ; yet a thousand times rather would he forget Helen Lingard than lose from his heart one word of the Master, whose love was the root and only pledge and security of love, the only power that could glorify it—could cleanse it from the mingled selfishness that wrought for its final decay and death.

The sun was down ere he left the park, and the twilight was rapidly following the sun as he drew near to the Abbey on his way home. Suddenly, more like an odour than a sound, he heard the organ, he thought. Never yet had he heard it on a week-day : the organist was not of those who haunt their instrument. Often of late had the curate gazed on that

organ as upon a rock filled with sweet waters, before which he stood a Moses without his rod; sometimes the solemn instrument appeared to him a dumb Jeremiah that sat there from Sunday to Sunday, all the week long, with his head bowed upon his hands, and not a Jebusite to listen to him: if only his fingers had been taught the craft, he thought how his soul would pour itself out through the song-tubes of that tabernacle of sweetness and prayer, and on the blast of its utterance ascend to the throne of the most high! Who could it be that was now peopling the silence of the vast church with melodious sounds, worshipping creatures of the elements? If the winds and the flames of fire are his angels, how much more the grandly consorting tones of the heavenly organ! He would go and see what power informed the vaporous music.

He entered the church by one of the towers, in which a stair led skyward, passing the neighbourhood of the organ, and having a door to its loft. As he ascended, came a pause in the music;—and then, like the breaking up of a summer cloud in the heavenliest of rain-showers, began the prelude to the solo in the Messiah, *Thou didst not leave his soul in hell.* Up still the curate crept softly. All at once a rich full contralto voice—surely he had heard it before—came floating out on the torrent, every tone bearing a word of sorrowful triumph in its bosom.

He reached the door. Very gently he opened it, and peeped in. But the back of the organ was towards him, and he could see nothing. He stepped upon the tiles of the little apse. One stride cleared the end of the organ, and he saw the face of the singer; it *was* Helen Lingard!

She started. The music folded its wings and dropped—like a lark into its nest. But Helen recovered herself at once, rose from her ministration at the music-altar, and approached the curate.

"Have I taken too great a liberty?" she said, in a gentle steady voice.

"No, surely," he answered. "I am sorry I startled you. I wish you would wake such sounds oftener."

"He didn't leave my brother's soul in hell, did he, Mr. Wingfold?" she said abruptly, and her eyes shone through the dusk.

"If ever a soul was taken out of hell, it was Leopold's," returned the curate. "And it lifts mine out of it too," he added, "to hear you say so."

"I behaved very badly to you. I confess my fault. Will you forgive me?" she said.

"I love you too much to be able to forgive you;" that was the word in the curate's heart, but a different found its way to his lips.

"My heart is open to you, Miss Lingard," he said: "take what forgiveness you think you need. For what I can tell, it may be my part to ask forgiveness, not to grant it. If I have been harder to you than there was need, I pray you to forgive me. Perhaps I did not enter enough into your difficulties."

"You never said one word more than that was right, or harder than I deserved. Alas! I can no more—in this world, at least—ask Leopold to forgive me, but I can ask you and Mr. Polwarth, who were as the angels of God to him, to pardon me for him and for yourselves too. I was obstinate and proud and selfish.—Oh, Mr. Wingfold, can you, do you really believe that Leopold is somewhere? Is he alive this moment? Shall I ever—ever—I don't mind if it's a thousand years first—but shall I *ever* see him again?"

"I do think so. I think the story must be true that tells us Jesus took to himself again the body he left on the cross and brought it with him out of its grave."

"Will you take me for a pupil—a disciple—and teach me to believe—or hope, if you like that word better—as you do?" said Helen humbly.

How the heart of the curate beat—like the drum of a praising orchestra!

"Dear Miss Lingard," he answered very solemnly, "I can teach you nothing; I can but show you where I found what has changed my life from a bleak November to a sunny June—with its thunder-storms no doubt—but still June beside

November. Perhaps I could help you a little if you were really set out to find Jesus, but you must yourself set out. It is you who must find him. Words of mine, as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, may let you know that one is near who thinks he sees him, but it is you who must search, and you who must find. If you do search, you will find, with or without help of mine.—But it is getting dark.—You have the key of the north door, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Then will you lock the door, and take the key to Mrs. Jenkins. I will stay here a while, and then follow you home, if you will allow me, where we can have a little talk together. Ah, what an anthem the silent organ will play for me!"

Helen turned and went down into the church, and thence home.

The curate remained with the organ. It was silent, and so were his lips, but his heart—the music was not latent there, for his praise and thanksgiving ascended, without voice or instrument, essential harmony, to the ear that hears thought, and the heart that vibrates to every chord of feeling in the hearts it has created. Ah! what is it we send up thither, where our thoughts are either a dissonance or a sweetness and a grace? Alone in the dusky church, the curate's ascended like a song of the angels, for his heart was all a thanksgiving—not for any perfected gift, but for many a lovely hope. He knelt down by the organ and worshipped the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ—that God and no other was the God of his expectation. When he rose from his knees, the Church was dark, but through the windows of the clerestory many stars were shining.

THE END.

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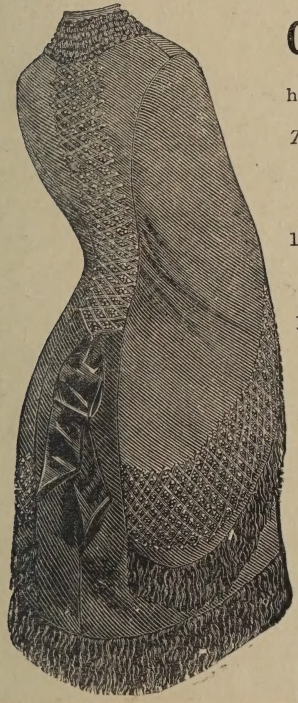

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